ARGOSY

MARCH, 1959

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THE SHORT STORY MAGAZINE

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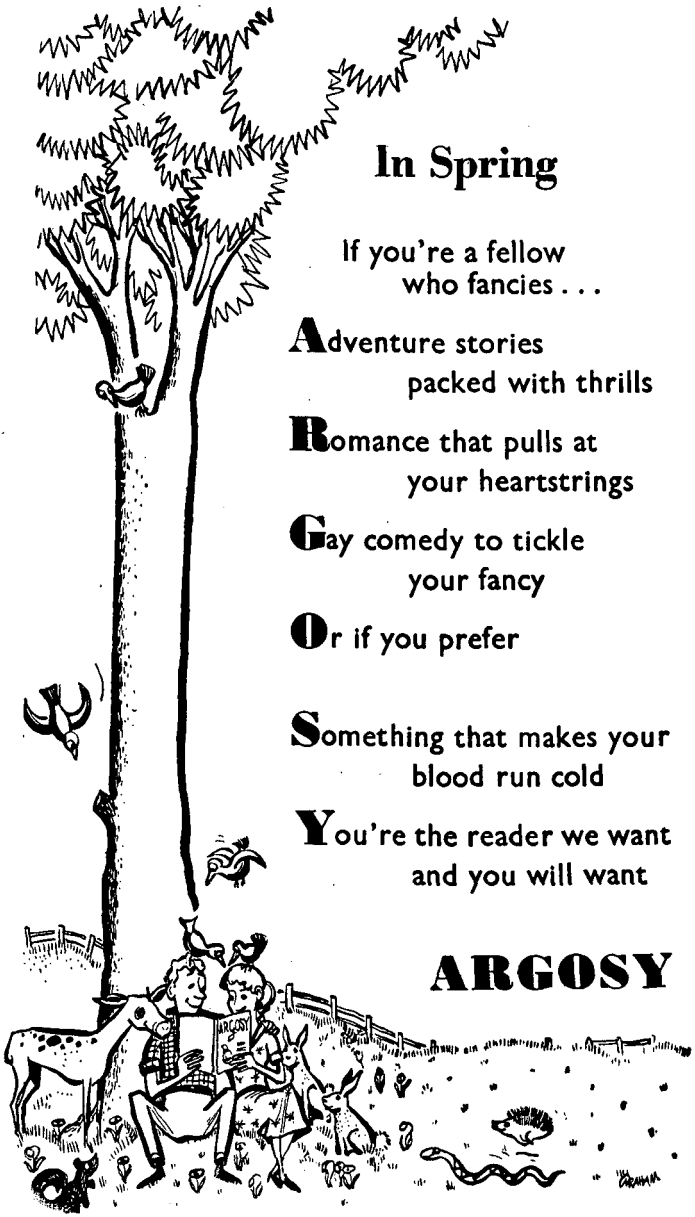

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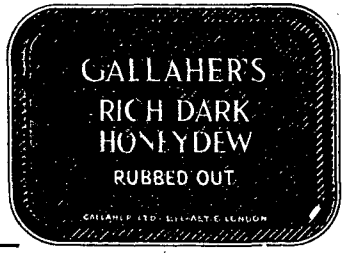

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ARGOSY

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Log Book

ROUND about this time of year, our natures are invaded by two warring impulses—the urge to stock up and the urge to chuck out. Nest-building battles with spring-cleaning. It's a wonder we don't all go round the bend. Instead, the thrifty householder goes off to auction sales. He takes with him the old umbrella-stand, the mower that won't go, and Aunt Georgina's water-colours from the attic. He wants a nice little table for the blank corner of the lounge where the television set stood before he took the advice of *Do It Yourself* and built a TV room.

HAMMER AND TONGS!

The amazing thing about auction sales is that *someone* always buys *everything*.

"Here's a useful collection of old lace," says the auctioneer. "What am I bid for it? A shilling? Come now, ladies and gentlemen, do you want me to throw in some arsenic as well? Two shillings? I can see I shall have to add in the next lot, three sheepskins and a ship's bell. Jim, hold up the bell. Oh—well, never mind. Five shillings? Five *shillings*? Ladies, ladies, don't make me laugh. Here's three beautiful sheepskins, you want the sheep as well? Add in lot three, Jim, portfolio of etchings, just right to show the young lady-friend on a Saturday evening. Five, five, six am I bid? Put in the next lot, antique pair of blacksmiths' bellows. Nice, clean job." (Everything in auctioneer language is a nice clean job, from etchings to Chippendale.)

"Come on, ladies, make a bid, bidding's very slow, I'll throw in the next lot, Oriental jardinière, venetian glass lustres, and a plinth. Who'll raise me to ten bob? You, sir? Sold to the gentleman, and a bargain lot it is, too, for ten bob."

Our householder totters home with his prize. The jardinière

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will do for that empty corner, the lace and sheepskins are sure to come in handy—a waistcoat, maybe?—so is the ship's bell; the bellows—perhaps we can stand the rubber plant on them. Not much we can do with the etchings, but there's room in the attic, now we've got rid of Auntie G's old water-colours.

So the world goes round and the wheels of commerce keep on turning. One man's swing is another man's roundabout.

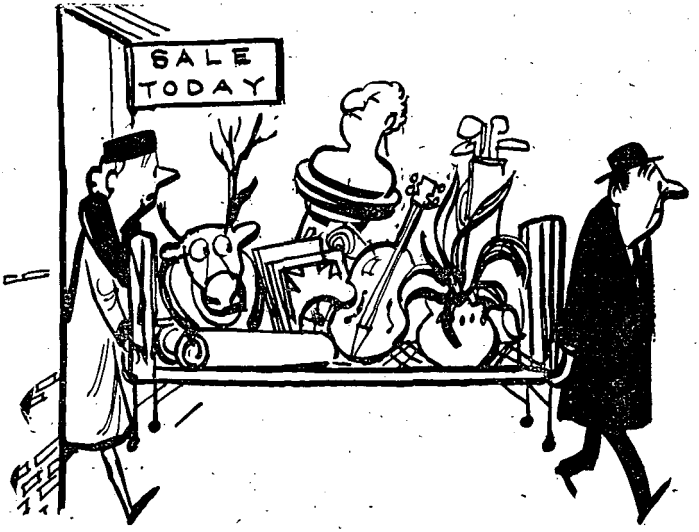
SPEAKING VOLUMES

What will the scientists think of next? Not content with producing deaf aids for dogs, so that you can still read Argosy aloud to your elderly pet, they have now achieved a machine capable of measuring wear and tear on books that are constantly showered with grit and gravel. The answer is a lengthy and complicated mathematical equation and what it boils down to is this: books soon wear out if you constantly throw grit at them.

Even Argosy shows signs of deterioration after the ninetieth shovelful of granite chips. While we don't for a moment suppose that Argosy readers behave in this callous fashion to their cherished hoards of back numbers, we do put out the suggestion that half a dozen Argosies bound together make a sturdy and handsome volume ideally adapted for bedside dipping.

ON THE MENU THIS MONTH—

Patrick Ryan says he spent his formative years in the Old



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Kent Road; he seems to feel considerable nostalgia for it still. Irish by descent, he now lives in Yorkshire, paints for pleasure, and asserts that he will never be prolific as a writer so long as the TV set is kept in the only room with a fire, and his small daughter insists on pushing the typewriter carriage back at the end of every line.

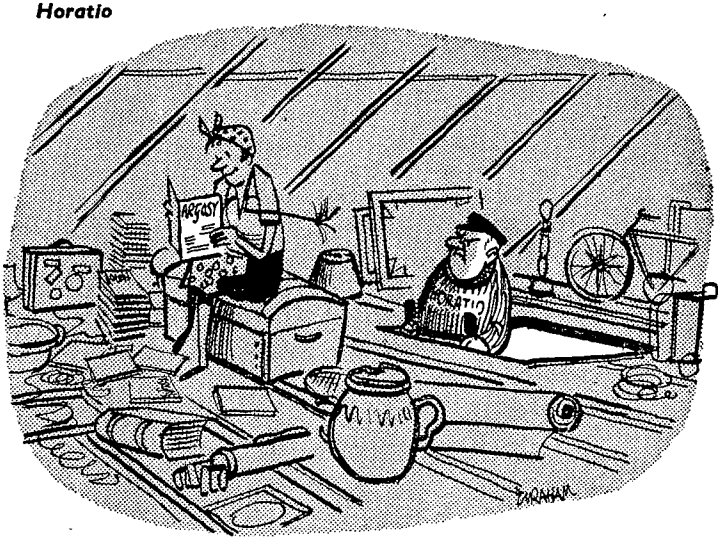
Duff Hart-Davis, one of Argosy's youngest contributors, is up at Oxford reading Greats. His extra-mural activities include shooting, rugger, and roughing it on tramp steamers—hence his first Argosy story.

Douglas Leach, author of *Woola, Woola,* tells us that as a young man he was a rolling stone: a soldier in the First World War; a bush-worker in Queensland; a lumberjack in British Columbia. Now lives with his wife, son, and daughter in an old house outside Salcombe. Hobbies are sailing, tennis, and watching his Siamese cat and his three Salukis. Main difficulty in writing—trying to persuade his wife that when stretched out in easy chair with eyes closed, he is really working hard thinking up another story.

Ray Bradbury's story is from his exciting new collection, *The Day it Rained Forever,* soon to be published by Rupert Hart-Davis.

Stop press: Congratulations to Petrella who reappears this month, promoted Detective *Inspector.* JOHN SILVER

Horatio



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LOVE AND THE FORTY MARTYRS

It landed me in
the first of my troubles with women

BY PATRICK RYAN

WE had three books in our house when I was a child. That may not sound a lot to you, but it was three more than most houses could muster in our neck of the Old Kent Road. They provided all the serious reading of my first ten years; for me, all truth and adult knowledge lay within their covers, and their words were above even the wisdom of teachers.

I was gratified, however, when in my eleventh year the Council announced the opening of a children's library. The librarian, a cadaverous Scot, came to our school to give us a bloodthirsty lecture of introduction.

"You will be allowed to keep a book for fourteen days. If you want to keep it longer, you must come to the library and have it renewed. If you don't do that and you keep it longer, you will be fined one halfpenny a day for every extra day. And don't anyone think for a moment that the library will forget about a book if you don't bring it back. We shall not forget; nor shall we forget to record the fines against your name as they mount up: one halfpenny a day, threepence-halfpenny a week, one shilling and twopence a month, fourteen shillings a year . . ."

Children to him were but prospective book-stealers, and he went on to tell hair-raising stories of how the Council bloodhounds had pursued library offenders down the years to the ends of the earth, extracting massive fines, taking them to court, seizing their property and—one wonderful day—sending a stubborn culprit to prison. I don't know how the others felt, but his lantern jaw and accusing eye certainly put the fear straight up me.

When he'd finished, Brother Joseph, the headmaster, came forward in his black cassock and told of the personal agony he would bring to anyone who disappointed the librarian.

The first of my three books, *Mrs. Beeton's Cookery Book*, was left behind by my mother when she'd died four years before.

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Except that the pictures of contorted napkins and the notes on the management of servants gave me ideas above my station, little trouble came to me from it. My father's stomach, however, caught the occasional tumult when I tangled with her more exotic recipes.

The second, *The Casket of Gems*, was a Victorian collection of English verse. The compiler was a fan of Ebenezer Elliott, and sixty-four of the hundred poems were from his pen. Consequently, I grew up with the firm belief that he was the greatest poet who ever lived, infinitely superior to Shakespeare or Milton, each of whom merited only two gems in the casket. My unshapely right ear bears witness that my first English master was impatient and left-handed.

The last book, *Simple Pictorial Lives of the Saints*, was my favourite. It consisted of short biographies of the saints arranged in calendar order of their name-days. The illustrations were its prime attraction. To justify a picture as well as text, you had to be martyred; then you got a half-page line engraving of the manner of your death. The artist had clearly been both busy and cheerful because, although there were people on every other page being thrown to lions, filled with arrows, broken on wheels, or cooked over slow fires, everybody, including the victims, bore the same expression of preoccupied complacency and good humour.

My study of the *Simple Pictorial* made me something of a boy wonder in hagiology, and this was no mean asset at a church school. It also, unfortunately, landed me in the first of my troubles with women.

At that time, I was in love with a beautiful ten-year-old named Maisie. She was like an elf, with big, brown eyes, and black sausage curls trembling down her back. I met her soon after the librarian's assault.

"Hullo, Maisie. When you going to be my girl friend?"

"Never said I was."

"You be my girl friend and my gang'll look after you."

"I don't want your old gang to come near me. And I told you—I told everybody—I'm going to be friends with the boy who carries the banner in the procession next Sunday."

And she ran into her house.

"All right," I shouted. "It'll be me. You'll see."

Apart from straight sex, there was prestige bound up in my love for Maisie. The boys in the school were organised into gangs and I led one. Following the Chicago pattern, women were one of the recognised prestige-symbols. Maisie was rated No. 1

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girl of her vintage, and the capture of her public affection would put my lot up near the top of the tree.

The class banner was always carried in the June Procession by the top boy in religious knowledge. The *Simple Pictorial* and I were away ahead of the field except for one Vincent Perkins, who was only a couple of merit marks behind. He was of gentler nurture than most of us, clean and neat of habit, and marked as a sissy.

Most mornings Miss Talbot, our teacher, would ask if anyone knew which saint's day it was. You got a merit mark for the right answer. If it was St. George's Day or some such popular anniversary, a forest of hands went up. But when it was one of the obscurer saints like Simeon Stylites or Francis Xavier, the field was clear for me. I piled up marks that way and, knowing that all the saints that week were obscure, I considered the banner was already mine.

Unfortunately, my continued success seemed to be giving Miss Talbot a bit of a complex. She wasn't long out of college, and I think she had to look the saints up herself before she could risk asking questions about them. Of late, anyway, she had appeared resentful of my erudition, and flinched visibly when I told her the details about St. Quirinius and the floating millstone.

Next morning, the Monday before the procession, she asked warily, "Is there anyone who can tell me whose day it is today?"

I'd been looking forward to that moment, because my favourite saint's day was involved. It was a multiple celebration for the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste. You will know, of course, that they were forty Roman soldiers stationed at Sebaste who became Christians and refused the command of their general to worship the Roman gods.

It was winter, and he had them stripped and marched into a freezing lake, where they stayed until they succumbed. The illustration showed the forty naked men, made decent by the fluttering of the robes and pennants of their guards, marching down the road with forty angels overhead.

Alone, I raised my hand. Her mouth gave a little twitch.

Then Vincent Perkins put his hand up.

"Ah," she said, "Vincent. Yes?"

"St. Margaret, miss."

"And you?" She pointed at me.

I stood up to give it a bit of production. "The Forty Martyrs of Sebaste, miss."

She nearly fell off her stool.

"The what?"

"The Forty Martyrs of Sebaste."

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She leaned forward, doubting her ears. "Really, what an extraordinary idea! The how many martyrs of where?"

"Forty, Miss Talbot, of Sebaste. It's a town in Armenia where forty soldiers—"

"You're wrong this time," she smiled triumphantly. "June the tenth is devoted to St. Margaret, and Vincent gets the merit mark."

This was robbery. It looked like a fix.

"But, Miss Talbot, it isn't St. Margaret today. It's the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste. The general made them break the ice and they had no clothes on—"

"Now, that's quite enough. You're wrong this time."

"But I'm not, miss. I know I'm not."

She chuckled. "Now really! Did anyone else in the class ever hear of the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste?"

"'E's finking of the forty fieves of Ali Baba, miss," piped a comical enemy.

The whole place went up in laughter, and I stood there with prestige oozing out of me. I lost my temper and banged the desk. "I'm not wrong. It isn't St. Margaret's Day at all. You're only saying it is—"

She was no longer amused. "That will do. Sit down at once."

"It's not fair. You're the one who's wrong. You've only given him the mark because—"

"Come out here, then," she snapped. "We'll see what the headmaster has to say to that."

After she'd given the case for the prosecution, Brother Joseph ran a hand across his mane of silver hair, and said sternly, "And what would you be saying about your dreadful behaviour?"

"I'm sorry I was rude, sir. But it is the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste today."

"Oh? And what's your authority for that statement?"

"I read it in a book, sir."

I was loath to reveal the source of my success, but times were desperate.

"And what book?"

"The *Simple Pictorial Lives of the Saints*, sir. It's there for today, the Forty—"

"All right, spare us another repetition of your battle cry. You may be interested to know that I, too, have a book, issued by the Lord Bishop of Southwark himself, and it says today is St. Margaret's Day."

"I don't know about your book, sir. But there's a picture in mine of all forty of them."

"A picture, eh? And you'd challenge the Bishop just because

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he hasn't a picture in his book?" His bright blue eyes studied me through the gold-rimmed glasses. "Tell me, Miss Talbot, is this a clever boy in class?"

"Yes, sir. Up with the top ones."

"Imaginative?"

"Excessively."

"I see. So he may be telling lies. And he may not." He poked at my stomach with the cane. "You forfeit two merit marks for insolence, anyway. And you must bring me that book to see tomorrow. If you don't, you lose two more marks and—" He swished the cane down to thwack on his cassock.

The loss of two merit marks put me behind Vincent, but left me with a fair chance of Maisie. The loss of two more would be irreparable, so I had to show the book.

My father was working long night shifts then. He used to leave in the evening before I got in, and didn't get home until after I'd left in the morning. We used to correspond by notes between our weekend meetings.

As soon as I got home, I looked up the *Simple Pictorial* and, sure enough, I was right. There they all were for that day, duly listed and illustrated, my Forty Martyrs; and the Bishop could see it if he liked.

Then I noticed a violet rubber-stamp impression at the top of the page. Within an oval were the words, PROPERTY OF KIRKMAGIE PUBLIC LIBRARY. This stamp was repeated every ten or so pages through the book, but it had never had any real significance for me before.

I turned to the front cover. The inside face was completely covered by a library issue-sheet.

KIRKMAGIE PUBLIC LIBRARY

Books are loaned for fourteen days and must be returned on or before the last date shown below. A fine of threepence per week or part of a week will be charged if the book is kept after the last date shown below.

The last date shown in the columns below was 7th October 1919. I knew my father had brought the book home with him after the war, but now, thanks to the librarian's lecture, I realised he only had it on loan from the Kirkmagie Public Library.

And to date, in June 1935, he had had it for fifteen years, eight months, and about two weeks. Fifteen years, eight months overdue. I got a pencil and paper and worked out that the fine due at that moment was around ten pounds, three shillings!

Ten pounds, three shillings. It was a fortune!

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I saw again the wolfish eyes of the librarian as he told of his minions hunting offenders down the years; his teeth grinning wetly at the massive fines, the furniture seized, and the victim in prison . . .

Until recently, my father had been out of work and we were only just getting clear of accumulated debts. We couldn't afford to pay one pound three shillings, never mind ten pounds, not even if they put the bailiffs into our two rooms.

I had seen only one librarian, and all librarians were like him to me. The man at Kirkmagie would obviously be another dedicated Scot, ceaselessly searching for his lost volume of the *Simple Pictorial*, baffled at the moment maybe, but patiently waiting for a clue that would send him to the man who'd got it, to the man who'd have to pay him ten pounds three shillings—to my old man.

Brother Joseph was clearly on the side of the librarians—he'd said so himself—therefore, to show him the book would be fatal. He'd tell the local Javert, who'd light the beacon to Kirkmagie, and there we'd be, my father and I, back in trouble, up in court, deep in debt, out of a job.

The library stamp was embossed deep in the covers, so scraping off the front page wouldn't help. And I couldn't tear out every page with the stamp on, particularly the one about the Forty Martyrs. Fiddling like that might arouse suspicion, and be taken later as evidence of criminal intent.

There was only one way out of it. The wonder boy would have to lose two more merit marks and take whatever stick was coming to him. It would be good-bye to the banner, the conquest of Maisie, love, and prestige; and hullo to a completely new start as a gang-leader's junior assistant.

Forlorn and depressed, I whipped myself up something simple out of Mrs. Beeton and took to my bed . . .

Next morning, I told Brother Joseph I had nothing to say about the book. He pried a bit, but I wouldn't say any more, so he construed I was lying, filched my two marks, bent me over a chair, and belted me four times. It hurt, but not all that badly, and the weals didn't arouse much admiration. While I was displaying them in the cloakroom, someone told me Maisie hadn't come to school that day because her sister had mumps.

As I walked past her house, I saw her at the bedroom window.

"Hullo, Maisie. You're lucky being kept away from school."

"I don't like it much. I shall miss the procession."

"Can't you be in it if your sister's got mumps?"

"No. Nor at the tea party afterwards."

"Then how will you know who carries the banner?"

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"I'm going to watch it from up here. The procession comes down our street."

"Oh, I see."

She looked at me with those wonderful, brown eyes. "Who will it be? Is it decided yet?"

"Who do you hope it will be, Maisie?"

"I'm not saying."

"You're blushing. I bet you hope it's me. You hate that sissy Vincent, really."

"No, I don't. And I'm not blushing. You're horrid."

And she left the window and pulled the curtains.

I was coming up off rock-bottom. I hadn't lost the battle for Maisie yet. And an idea was creeping up on me.

The procession formed in the gardens of the church before winding out on a four- or five-mile tour of the district. It was a very grand and beautiful affair.

Up at the front would be the uniformed band, blazing out sacred music, and closely followed by a special contingent of honorary Knights of St. Columba. The honorary Knights were enrolled for the day, and they were all men like my father who loved fighting, but who only attended church at Easter and for the procession.

Occasionally, Orangemen or other trouble-makers would try to stop the procession. When they did, the honorary Knights would come forward to negotiate with them. To a man, whatever their individual suiting, they wore black bowler hats. Stuffed solid with newspaper, they were worn in case the Orangemen negotiated with bottles.

Then the procession proper would follow on. Ranks of solemn men in red and yellow and blue sashes; gauntleted leaders bearing great banners stretching across the road; proud and serious women with flags and flowers, sashed in pastel shades; the priests, stately, robed, and gorgeous; and the acolytes about them, holding aloft the statues, the cords of canopies, swinging incense, gold and misty grey; and the bright sound of communion bells; the nuns, clear black-and-white; and the children—girls in white frocks, veils and wreaths of white flowers in their hair; the boys, scrubbed near skinless, best-suited, hair-oiled, and shining like cherubs. A long ribbon of colour and music, flowers and incense.

In the centre, the great statue of the Madonna, girls and garlands and bright candles all about her, flower petals on the street before her, and the choir singing her praises to the little slum houses, echoing their voices from the black brick walls.

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The boys were walking six abreast, and I was nicely placed for my intent, in the centre of a line, two rows back from Vincent Perkins. I was wearing my best jersey and grey flannel shorts, and my father's latest hair-restorer was dripping down my neck. Vincent was dressed in a smart, blue suit and over it was the special sash with the pouch fitted to take the pole of the banner.

The class banner was a long, vertical pennant, fixed to a crossbar at the top and tapering down to tie at the point to the pole. Vincent held it proudly and it bellied out, fine and spectacular, like a pale blue Viking's sail, emblazoned with a white-and-gold angel, wings outspread, and the words, CHILDREN, KIND AND LOVING BE. It was a beautiful banner and I coveted it with all my heart. I also planned to take it, at the critical moment, by simple violence.

The procession, because of its length and the various crossroads, made frequent stops. One of these occurred about a hundred yards from Maisie's house. As we moved off again, the band struck up the school hymn.

When I came to the words, *Make me as a holy child, Gentle, tender, meek, and mild*, I moved up two ranks and got Vincent Perkins. I belted him across the ear and whipped the banner out of his pouch. He spun round in surprise, tripped the boy following, and fell with him to the ground. By the time they had picked themselves up, I was marching away with the angel billowing above my head, just as if I'd been carrying the banner all the time.

Twenty yards on, however, Vincent attacked me and snatched at the pole. "That's my banner. Miss Talbot said I was to have it. I won it, not you."

Not having a good legal argument, I made no reply. He jerked at the flag, and it broke away at the point and flapped out in front. I held the pole high with my left hand and beat him off with my right, devoutly singing the hymn. He kept beside me, tugging and scrapping. The pole came down and cracked against a lamp-post. It bent and sagged ominously just above my grip. Then I got my right arm free and copped him a good one, smack on the nose, so that he fell back among the advancing singers.

I recaptured the wayward end of the banner and held it in its proper place, gripping the pole on either side of the crack to keep it straight. As we came up to Maisie's house, she was standing at the bedroom window, looking wonderful in her white procession frock, the flowers in her dark hair. I raised the banner high in salute and gave it a triumphant waggle. She saw me and smiled, waving back excitedly and clapping her hands.

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Then, slap in front of her house, the procession stopped. I was just settling to send her dreamy messages with the eyes, when Vincent hit me a curious blow on top of the head. Blood seeping from his nose, he leapt on my back and I fell forward to the ground, banner and all, the pole bringing down three boys in front, the crossbar whipping the flowers from the heads of three girls and engaging intimately in their skirts. They began to wriggle and cry, and the pole snapped in half at the weak spot.

Vincent was like a wildcat now, all boots and teeth and fingernails. We rolled across the road, wrestling down into the gutter, the banner wrapping round us, catching the splintered ends of the pole and ripping the angel down the wings, bringing two more boys to the earth.

Meanwhile, the band was blaring away piously, and the children still on their feet were obediently bawling our wish to be, *Each to each a loving brother, Gentle, kind to one another.*

Then we came up against the kerb and stopped rolling, and I was able to be kind and gentle to Vincent in a scientific manner. I got on top of him, pinned him down with my knees, and started to clobber him into friendship. For a few moments he flailed back madly, socking me in the eye and scratching my cheek, but then he gave in, covered his head with his arms, and started crying.

I didn't feel too good myself, my eye coming up, blood trickling down on to my sash, and a chaos of children all round me. But I'd won, and I set to picking up the banner and the bits of pole. A figure in white brushed past me and knelt beside Vincent. It was Maisie.

"Come on, Vincent," she said, helping him up. "It's all right, now. I won't let him hit you any more."

"Hullo, Maisie," I said brightly. "Look. I got the banner." I held up the remnants.

"Don't you speak to me, you bully—you beastly bully, hitting poor Vincent like that."

Bully! And me giving away two inches and half a stone.

She took a swing as she came up and caught me hard on the nose. My eyes started to water.

"But, Maisie, I beat him fair and square. And you said it would be the one who carried the banner."

"I don't care what I said. You shouldn't have hit Vincent like that. He never hurt you."

And then a hand descended on the scruff of my neck.

"So it's you, is it? I might have known it," said Brother Joseph. "Fighting in a holy procession, and tearing your class banner to pieces. That's fine behaviour to show to the people

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watching us, isn't it? That's a fine way to bring disgrace to your school and shame upon your church. It's lucky you are we're in the public street, my boy."

"I'm sorry, sir. I didn't mean to break the banner."

The band struck up and the procession moved forward once more, saving me from immediate destruction.

"Come on, now. Off you all go again. But not you, my lad." Brother Joseph pushed me out of the ranks and on to the pavement. "You're not fit to walk in the procession. I'll see you in my study at nine o'clock tomorrow."

And the procession moved proudly on, without me. There I was, standing on the pavement among the Protestants and the Methodists and other unlucky people who didn't have processions. I rolled the tattered blue-and-gold of the banner round the broken sticks and walked away home. As I went I saw Maisie ushering Vincent into her house, her arm consolingly about his shoulders. It's funny about women, the way they always go for the loser in the end. I suppose it's their maternal instinct coming out.

My father stayed out celebrating with the honorary Knights after the procession, so I had the evening alone. Melancholy had me again, face-down on that old rock-bottom. I took out the *Simple Pictorial* and looked at the Forty Martyrs. I had done well out of the book at first, but lately it had brought me nothing but calamity; its good luck was running out, and it was becoming a talisman of trouble. It was potential dynamite, too —at any time, the librarian bloodhounds might pick up the scent and come for their ten pounds three shillings. So I decided to get rid of it.

I took it over to the church and dropped it in the gift box. This was a big wooden chest in which you could put anything useful you didn't want. The brothers would sort the things out and distribute them to poor and needy people who could make use of them. It might cheer up someone poor and needy to see how much worse off some of the people in the *Simple Pictorial* were.

As I turned to go, Brother Joseph came through a door from the cloisters.

"Well, and you're putting something in the gift box. Good, good . . . Oh! It's you." He recognised me and peered suspiciously into the box. He thought I'd put a bomb in it.

"Well now," he went on reflectively, as he picked up the book, "*Simple Pictorial Lives of the Saints.* The book to beat the Bishop. But I thought you hadn't got it. I thought I beat you for telling lies about it?"

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I saw the hard, accusing eye of the librarian, and my father behind bars. "It's not mine, sir. I didn't put it in—"

"I think we'd better have a talk about this. I'm not sure either of us is very happy . . ." He led me firmly through the door to the cloisters.

In his room he got me some lemonade and cakes left from the tea party. There was no way out now. I told him about my recent life and hard times, my rise, my fall, the librarian nightmares, love and prestige, the ten pounds three shillings, the resort to violence, the treachery of women, and how, contrary to popular belief and outward appearances, my father was a good man who should not go to prison.

"Well," he said at the end. "You've certainly sampled life these last few days. It may not all have been enjoyable, but it was certainly valuable experience."

He turned the pages of the *Simple Pictorial*. "Let's see, now, about the Forty Martyrs. Why, bless my soul! But you're right, my boy. There they are for June the tenth. But, nevertheless, it's wrong, quite wrong. There should be a note somewhere." He flicked through the opening pages. "Ah! Here it is, the key to all the trouble."

Between the two title pages was fixed a narrow strip of paper about an inch wide. The printing on it was very small.

"Can you read that word at the top, my boy?"

"It seems like—er—errata."

"Good. Do you know what it means?"

"No, sir."

"It means a list of errors. When they make a mistake in printing a book, they put in a little slip like this to tell the reader about it. They always seem to hide them. I suppose they're ashamed of them. What does this one say?

Page 84, line 7, for March, read June.
Page 142, line 11, for June, read March.

"And that's it. They print these books from separate sheets of copy for each day. In this edition, they transposed the sheets for March 10th and June 10th. So you've got St. Margaret and the Forty Martyrs crossed over."

I felt a bit deflated. All that trouble over a printer's error. Miss Talbot was right and, as ever in my life, I had been most dogmatic when most mistaken.

"I'm very sorry, sir, that I made all that fuss. But I didn't know about erratas."

"Never mind. You can stand up for your Forty Martyrs next March. And, anyway, the Bishop'll be relieved to know you're

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not challenging him any more." He got up from his chair. "I don't think the Kirkmagie Library will be interested in the *Simple Pictorial* now but, just to be on the safe side, we'll leave it anonymously in the gift box. I'll see our librarian doesn't hear of it, and that it gets to someone who really needs it. Perhaps Miss Talbot or someone like that.

"But you can forget all about it, and there'll be plenty of books to replace it for you in the new library, now."

"Thank you, sir," I said as we parted. "Thank you very much."

All my troubles gone, I skipped away up the street. I turned at the corner and saw Brother Joseph still standing in the doorway. I waved gratefully, and he raised his hand, half in salute, half in blessing. I was off rock-bottom and ready to beat my way up again, and my heart was further comforted the following week when I heard that both Vincent and Maisie were monstrous with mumps.

As I passed The Turk's Head, the honorary Knights were beating it up. My father and Fiddler Murphy, bowler-hatted, were solemnly dancing in the road to secret music. A policeman was eyeing them thoughtfully.

I spurted to get to them before he went into action. This I understood, this I could handle, just ordinary routine trouble without any dangerous complications like errata or printer's errors or women mixed up in it.

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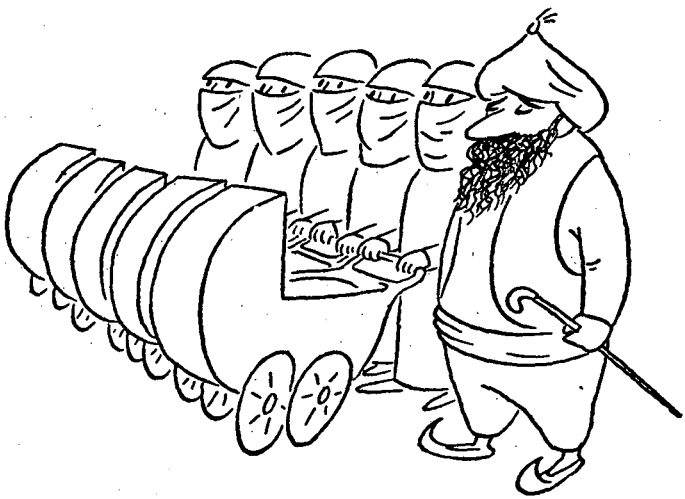

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GOING UP

" I can't wait for him," she cried,
" I'll miss the plane "

BY ROALD DAHL

ALL her life, Mrs. Foster had had an almost pathological fear of missing a train, a plane, a boat, or even a theatre curtain.

In other respects, she was not a particularly nervous woman, but the mere thought of being late on occasions like these would throw her into such a state of nerves that she would begin to twitch.

It was nothing much—just a tiny, vellicating muscle in the corner of the left eye, like a secret wink—but the annoying thing was that it refused to disappear until an hour or so after the train or plane or whatever it was had been safely caught.

It is really extraordinary how in certain people a simple apprehension about a thing like catching a train can grow into a serious obsession. At least half an hour before it was time to leave the house for the station, Mrs. Foster would step out of the lift all ready to go, with hat and coat and gloves, and then, being quite unable to sit down, she would flutter and fidget about from room to room until her husband, who must have been well aware of her state, finally emerged from his privacy and suggested in a cool, dry voice that perhaps they had better get going now, had they not?

Mr. Foster may possibly have had a right to be irritated by this foolishness of his wife's, but he could have had no excuse for increasing her misery by keeping her waiting unnecessarily. Mind you, it is by no means certain that this is what he did, yet whenever they were to go somewhere, his timing was so accurate—just a minute or two late, you understand—and his manner so bland, that it was hard to believe he wasn't purposely inflicting a nasty, private, little torture of his own on the unhappy lady.

And one thing he must have known—that she would never dare to call out and tell him to hurry. He had disciplined her too well for that. He must also have known that if he was prepared to wait even beyond the last moment of safety, he could drive her nearly into hysterics.

On one or two special occasions in the later years of their

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married life, it seemed almost as though he had wanted to miss the train simply in order to intensify the poor woman's suffering.

Assuming (though one cannot be sure) that the husband was guilty, what made his attitude doubly unreasonable was the fact that, with the exception of this one small, irrepressible foible, Mrs. Foster was and always had been a good and loving wife. For over thirty years, she had served him loyally and well. There was no doubt about this. Even she, a very modest woman, was aware of it, and although she had for years refused to let herself believe that Mr. Foster would ever consciously torment her, there had been times recently when she had caught herself beginning to wonder.

Mr. Eugene Foster, who was nearly seventy years old, lived with his wife in a large, six-storey house in East Sixty-second Street, and they had four servants. It was a gloomy place, and few people came to visit them. But on this particular morning in February, the house had come alive and there was a great deal of bustling about. One maid was distributing bundles of dust sheets to every room, while another was draping them over the furniture. The butler was bringing down suitcases and putting them in the hall. The cook kept popping up from the kitchen to have a word with the butler.

And Mrs. Foster herself, in an old-fashioned fur coat and with a black hat on the top of her head, was flying from room to room and pretending to supervise these operations. She was thinking of nothing at all except that she was going to miss her plane if her husband didn't come out of his study soon and get ready.

"What time is it, Walker?" she said to the butler as she passed him.

"It's ten minutes past nine, madam."

"And has the car come?"

"Yes, madam, it's waiting. I'm going to put the luggage in."

"It takes an hour to get to Idlewild," she said. "My plane leaves at eleven. I have to be there half an hour beforehand for the formalities. I shall be late. I just *know* I'm going to be late."

"I think you have plenty of time, madam," the butler said kindly. "I warned Mr. Foster that you must leave at nine-fifteen. There's still another five minutes."

"Yes, Walker, I know, I know. But get the luggage in quickly, will you please?"

She began walking up and down the hall, and whenever the butler came by, she asked him the time. This, she kept telling herself, was the one plane that she must not miss. It had taken months to persuade her husband to allow her to go. If she missed it, he might easily decide that she should cancel the whole

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thing. But the trouble was that he insisted on coming to the airport to see her off.

"Dear God," she said aloud, "I'm going to miss it. I know, I know, I *know* I'm going to miss it." The little muscle beside the left eye was twitching madly. The eyes themselves were very close to tears.

"What time is it, Walker?"

"It's eighteen minutes past, madam."

"Now I really *shall* miss it," she cried. "Oh, I wish he would come!"

This was an important journey for Mrs. Foster. She was going all alone to Paris to visit her daughter, her only child, who was married to a Frenchman. Mrs. Foster didn't care much for the Frenchman, but she was fond of her daughter and, more than that, she had developed a great yearning to set eyes on her three grandchildren. She knew them only from the many photographs that she had received and that she kept putting up all over the house.

Lately, she had come more and more to feel that she did not really wish to live out her days in a place where she could not be near these children, and have them come to see her, and take them for walks, and buy them presents, and watch them grow.

She knew, of course, that it was wrong and, in a way, disloyal to have thoughts like these while her husband was still alive. She knew also that although he was no longer active in his many enterprises, he would never consent to leave New York and live in Paris. It was a miracle that he had ever agreed to let her fly over there alone to visit them for six weeks. But, oh, how she wished she could live there always, and be close to them!

"Walker, what time is it?"

"Twenty-two minutes past, madam."

As he spoke, a door opened and Mr. Foster came into the hall. He stood for a moment, looking intently at his wife, and she looked back at him—at this diminutive but still quite dapper old man with the huge, bearded face.

"Well," he said, "I suppose perhaps we'd better get going fairly soon if you want to catch that plane."

"*Yes*, dear—*yes*! Everything's ready. The car's waiting."

"That's good," he said. With his head over to one side, he was watching her closely. He had a peculiar way of cocking the head and then moving it in a series of small, rapid jerks. Because of this and because he was clasping his hands up high in front of him, near the chest, he was somehow like a squirrel standing there—a quick, clever, old squirrel from the park.

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" Here's Walker with your coat, dear. Put it on."

" I'll be with you in a moment," he said. " I'm just going to wash my hands."

She waited for him, and the tall butler stood beside her, holding the coat and the hat.

" Walker, shall I miss it? "

" No, madam," the butler said. " I think you'll make it all right."

Then Mr. Foster appeared again, and the butler helped him on with his coat. Mrs. Foster hurried outside and got into the hired Cadillac. Her husband followed her, but he walked down the steps of the house slowly, pausing halfway to observe the sky and to sniff the cold morning air.

" It looks a bit foggy," he said as he sat down beside her in the car. " And it's always worse out there at the airport. I shouldn't be surprised if the flight's cancelled already."

" Don't say that, dear—please."

They didn't speak again until the car had crossed over the river to Long Island.

" I've arranged everything with the servants," said Mr. Foster. " They're all going off today. I gave them half pay for six weeks and told Walker I'd send him a telegram when we wanted them back."

" Yes," she said. " He told me."

" I'll move into the club tonight. It'll be a nice change staying at the club."

" Yes, dear. I'll write to you."

" I'll call in at the house occasionally to see that everything's all right and to pick up the post."

" But don't you really think Walker should stay there all the time to look after things? " she asked meekly.

" Nonsense. It's quite unnecessary. And anyway, I'd have to pay him full wages."

" Oh yes," she said. " Of course."

" What's more, you never know what people get up to when they're left alone in a house," Mr. Foster announced, and with that he took out a cigar and, after snipping off the end with a silver cutter, lit it with a gold lighter.

She sat still in the car, with her hands clasped together tightly under the rug. " Will you write to me? " she asked.

" I'll see," he said. " But I doubt it. You know I don't hold with letter-writing unless there's something specific to say."

" Yes, dear, I know. So don't you bother."

As they approached the flat marshland on which Idlewild is built, the fog began to thicken and the car had to slow down.

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" Oh dear," cried Mrs. Foster. " I'm *sure* I'm going to miss it now! What time is it? "

" Stop fussing," the old man said. " It doesn't matter anyway. It's bound to be cancelled. They never fly in this sort of weather. I don't know why you bothered to come out."

She couldn't be sure, but it seemed to her that there was suddenly a new note in his voice, and she turned to look at him. It was difficult to observe any change in his expression under all that hair. The mouth was what counted. She wished, as she had so often before, that she could see the mouth clearly. The eyes never showed anything except when he was in a rage.

" Of course," he went on, " if by any chance it *does* go—I agree with you—you'll be certain to miss it now. Why don't you resign yourself to that? "

She turned away and peered through the window at the fog. It seemed to be getting thicker as they went along, and she could only just make out the edge of the road and the margin of grass-land beyond it. She knew that her husband was still looking at her. She glanced back at him again, and this time she noticed with a kind of horror that he was staring intently at the corner of her left eye where she could feel the muscle twitching.

" Won't you? " he said.

" Won't I what? "

" Be sure to miss it now if it goes. We can't drive fast in this."

He didn't speak to her any more after that. The car crawled on and on. The driver had a yellow lamp directed on to the edge of the road, and this helped him to keep going. Other lights, some white and some yellow, kept coming out of the fog towards them, and there was an especially bright one that followed close behind them all the time.

Suddenly the driver stopped the car.

" There! " Mr. Foster cried. " We're stuck. I knew it."

" No, sir," the driver said, turning round. " We've made it. This is the airport."

Without a word, Mrs. Foster jumped out and hurried through the main entrance into the building. There was a mass of people inside, mostly disconsolate passengers standing round the ticket counters. She pushed her way through and spoke to the man behind the counter.

" Yes," he said, " your flight is temporarily postponed. But please don't go away. We're expecting the fog to clear any moment."

She went back to her husband, who was still sitting in the car, and told him the news. " But don't you wait, dear," she said. " There's no sense in that."

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" I won't," he answered. " So long as the driver can get me back. Can you get me back, driver? "

" I think so," the man said.

" Is the luggage out? "

" Yes, sir."

" Good-bye, dear," Mrs. Foster said, leaning into the car and giving her husband a small kiss on the coarse, grey fur of his cheek.

" Good-bye," he answered. " Have a good trip."

The car drove off, and Mrs. Foster was left alone.

The rest of the day was a sort of nightmare for her. She sat for hour after hour on a bench, as close to the airline counter as possible, and every half hour or so she would get up and ask the man if the situation had changed. She always received the same reply—that she must continue to wait, because the fog might disperse at any moment. It wasn't until after six in the evening that the loud speakers finally announced that the flight had been cancelled until eleven o'clock the next morning.

Mrs. Foster didn't quite know what to do when she heard this news. She stayed sitting on her bench for at least another half hour wondering, in a tired, hazy sort of way, where she might go to spend the night. She hated to leave the airport. She didn't wish to see her husband. She was terrified that in one way or another he would eventually manage to prevent her from getting to France. She would have liked to remain just where she was, sitting on the bench the whole night through. That would be the safest. But she was already exhausted, and it didn't take her long to realise that this would be a ridiculous thing for an elderly lady to do. So in the end she went to a phone and rang the house.

Her husband, who was on the point of leaving for the club, answered it himself. She told him the news, and asked whether the servants were still there.

" They've all gone," he said.

" In that case, dear, I'll get myself a room somewhere for the night. Don't you bother yourself about it at all."

" That would be foolish," he said. " You've a large house here at your disposal. Use it."

" But, dear, it's empty."

" Then I'll stay with you myself."

" There's no food in the house. There's nothing."

" Then eat before you come in. Don't be so stupid, woman. Everything you do, you seem to want to make a fuss about."

" Yes," she said. " I'm sorry. I'll get myself a sandwich here, and then I'll come home."

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Outside, the fog had cleared a little, but it was a long, slow drive in the taxi and she didn't arrive back at the house until late.

Her husband emerged from his study when he heard her coming in. "Well," he said, standing by the study door, not moving across the hall to meet her, "how was Paris?"

"We leave at eleven in the morning," she answered. "It's definite."

"You mean if the fog clears."

"It's clearing now. There's a wind coming up."

"You look tired," he said. "You must have had an anxious day."

"It wasn't very comfortable. I think I'll go straight to bed."

"I've ordered a car for the morning," he said. "Nine o'clock."

"Oh, thank you, dear. And I certainly hope you're not going to bother to come all the way out again to see me off."

"No," he said slowly. "I don't think I will. But there's no reason why you shouldn't drop me at the club on your way."

She looked at him, and at that moment he seemed to be standing a long way off from her, beyond some borderline. He was suddenly so small and far away that she couldn't be sure what he was doing, or what he was thinking, or even what he was.

"The club is in town," she said. "It isn't on the way to the airport."

"But you'll have plenty of time, my dear. Don't you want to drop me at the club?"

"Oh yes—of course."

"That's good. Then I'll see you in the morning at nine."

She went up to her bedroom on the third floor, and she was so exhausted from her day that she fell asleep soon after she lay down.

Next morning Mrs. Foster was up early, and by eight-thirty she was downstairs and ready to leave.

Shortly after nine, her husband appeared. "Did you make any coffee?" he asked.

"No, dear. I thought you'd get a nice breakfast at the club. The car is here. It's been waiting. I'm all ready to go."

They were standing in the hall—they always seemed to be meeting in the hall nowadays—she with her hat and coat and handbag, he in a curiously-cut Edwardian jacket with high lapels.

"Your luggage?"

"It's at the airport."

"Ah yes," he said, "of course. And if you're going to take me to the club first, I suppose we'd better get going fairly soon, hadn't we?"

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"Yes!" she cried. "Oh, yes—*please*!"

"I'm just going to fetch a few cigars. I'll be with you in a moment. You get in the car."

She turned and went out to where the chauffeur was standing. He opened the car door for her as she approached.

"What time is it?" she asked him.

"About nine-fifteen."

Mr. Foster came out five minutes later and, watching him as he walked slowly down the steps, she noticed that his legs were like goat's legs in those narrow, stovepipe trousers that he wore. As on the day before, he paused halfway down to sniff the air and to examine the sky. The weather was still not quite clear, but there was a wisp of sun coming through the mist.

"Perhaps you'll be lucky this time," he said as he settled himself beside her in the car.

"Hurry, please," she said to the chauffeur. "Don't bother about the rug. I'll arrange the rug. Please go on. I'm late."

The man went back to his seat behind the wheel and started the engine.

"Just a moment!" Mr. Foster said suddenly. "Wait a moment, chauffeur, will you?"

"What is it, dear?" She saw him searching the pockets of his overcoat.

"I had a little present I wanted you to take to Ellen," he said. "Now, where on earth is it? I'm sure I had it in my hand as I came down."

"I didn't see you carrying anything. What sort of present?"

"A little box wrapped up in white paper. I forgot to give it to you yesterday. I don't want to forget it today."

"A little box!" Mrs. Foster cried. "I didn't see any little box!" She began hunting frantically in the back of the car.

Her husband continued searching through the pockets of his coat. Then he unbuttoned the coat and felt around in his jacket. "Confound it," he said, "I must've left it in my bedroom. I won't be a moment."

"Oh, *please*!" she cried. "We haven't got time. *Please* leave it! You can post it. It's only one of those silly combs, anyway. You're always giving her combs."

"And what's wrong with combs, may I ask?" he said, furious that she should have forgotten herself for once.

"Nothing, dear, I'm sure. But—"

"Stay there!" he commanded. "I'm going to fetch it."

"Be quick, dear! Oh, *please* be quick!"

She sat still, waiting and waiting.

"Chauffeur, what time is it?"

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The man consulted his wristwatch. "I make it nearly nine-thirty."

"Can we get to the airport in an hour?"

"Just about."

At this point, Mrs. Foster suddenly spotted a corner of something white wedged down in the crack of the seat on the side where her husband had been sitting. She reached over and pulled out a small, paper-wrapped box; and at the same time she couldn't help noticing that it was wedged firmly and deeply, as though with the help of a pushing hand.

"Here it is!" she cried. "I've found it! Oh dear, and now he'll be up there for ever searching for it. Chauffeur, quickly—run in and call him down, will you please?"

The chauffeur, a man with a small, rebellious, Irish mouth, didn't care very much for any of this, but he climbed out of the car and went up the steps to the front door of the house. He turned and came back. "Door's locked," he announced. "You've got a key?"

"Yes—wait a minute." She began hunting madly in her handbag. The little face was screwed up tight with anxiety, the lips pushed outward like a spout.

"Here it is! No—I'll go myself. It'll be quicker. I know where he'll be."

She hurried out of the car and up the steps to the front door, holding the key in one hand. She slid the key into the keyhole and was about to turn it—and then she stopped.

Her head came up, and she stood there absolutely motionless, her whole body arrested in the middle of all this hurry to turn the key and get into the house. She waited—five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten seconds, she waited. From the way she was standing there, with her head in the air and the body so tense, it seemed as though she was listening for the repetition of some sound that she had heard, or imagined she had heard, a moment before from a place far away inside the house.

Yes—quite obviously she was listening. Her whole attitude was a listening one. She appeared actually to be moving one of her ears closer and closer to the door. Now it was right up against the door. And for yet another few seconds she remained in that position, head up, ear to door, hand on key, about to enter but not entering, trying instead, or so it seemed, to hear and to analyse the sounds that were coming faintly from this place deep within the house.

Then, all at once, she sprang to life again. She withdrew the key from the door and came running back down the steps.

"It's too late!" she cried to the chauffeur. "I can't wait for

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him, I simply can't. I'll miss the plane. Hurry now, driver, hurry! To the airport!"

The chauffeur, had he been watching her closely, might have noticed that her face had turned absolutely white and that the whole expression had suddenly altered. There was no longer that rather soft and silly look. A peculiar hardness had settled itself upon the features. The little mouth, usually so flabby, was now tight and thin, the eyes were bright, and the voice, when she spoke, carried a new note of authority.

"Hurry, driver, hurry!"

"Isn't your husband travelling with you?" the man asked.

"Certainly not! I was only going to drop him at the club. It won't matter. He'll understand. He'll get a cab. Don't sit there talking, man. Get going! I've got a plane to catch!"

With Mrs. Foster urging him from the back seat, the man drove fast all the way, and she caught her plane with a few minutes to spare. Soon she was high up over the Atlantic, reclining comfortably, listening to the hum of the motors, heading for Paris at last.

The new mood was still with her. She felt remarkably strong and, in a queer sort of way, wonderful. She was a trifle breathless with it all, but this was more from pure astonishment at what she had done than anything else, and as the plane flew farther and farther away from New York and East Sixty-second Street, a great sense of calmness began to settle upon her.

By the time she reached Paris, she was just as strong and cool and calm as she could wish. She met her grandchildren, and they were even more beautiful in the flesh than in their photographs. They were like angels, she told herself, so beautiful were they. And every day she took them for walks, fed them with cakes, bought them presents, and told them stories.

Once a week, on Tuesdays, she wrote a letter to her husband —a nice, chatty letter—full of news and gossip, which always ended with the words, *Now be sure to take your meals regularly, dear, although this is something I'm afraid you may not be doing when I'm not with you.*

When the six weeks were up, everybody was sorry that she had to return to America, to her husband. Everybody, that is, except herself. Surprisingly, she didn't seem to mind as much as one might have expected, and when she kissed them all good-bye, there was something in her manner and in the things she said that appeared to hint at the possibility of a return in the not too distant future.

However, like the faithful wife she was, she did not overstay

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her time. Exactly six weeks after she had arrived, she sent a cable to her husband and caught the plane back to New York.

Arriving at Idlewild, Mrs. Foster was interested to observe that there was no car to meet her. It is possible that she might even have been a little amused. But she was extremely calm and did not overtip the porter who helped her into a taxi with her luggage.

New York was colder than Paris, and there were lumps of dirty snow lying in the gutters of the streets. The taxi drew up before the house in Sixty-second Street, and Mrs. Foster persuaded the driver to carry her two large cases to the top of the steps.

Then she paid him off and rang the bell. She waited, but there was no answer. Just to make sure, she rang again. She could hear it tinkling shrilly far away, at the back of the house. But still no one came.

So she took out her own key and opened the door herself.

The first thing she saw as she entered was a great pile of letters lying on the floor. The place was dark and cold. A dust sheet was still draped over the grandfather clock. In spite of the cold, the atmosphere was peculiarly oppressive, and there was a faint but curious odour in the air that she had never smelt before.

She walked quickly across the hall and disappeared for a moment round the corner to the left, at the back. There was something deliberate and purposeful about this action; she had the air of a woman about to investigate a rumour or to confirm a suspicion. When she returned a few seconds later, there was a little glimmer of satisfaction on her face.

She paused in the middle of the hall, as though wondering what to do next. Then she turned and went across into her husband's study. On the desk she found his address book, and after hunting through it she picked up the phone and dialled.

"Hullo," she said. "Listen—this is Mrs. Foster, East Sixty-second Street . . . Yes, that's right. Could you send someone round as soon as possible, do you think? . . . Yes, it seems to be stuck between the second and third floors. At least, that's where the indicator's pointing . . . Right away? Oh, that's very kind of you. You see, my legs aren't too good for walking up a lot of stairs. Thank you so much. Good-bye."

She replaced the receiver and sat there at her husband's desk, patiently waiting for the man who would be coming soon to repair the lift.

★ ★ ★

BALD TALK

Nothing recedes like success

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Ski-lark

The mould out of which good skiers are cast is usually made of plaster of Paris . . .

Turning around we gaze down steep ravine
Through tangled bush and rock to frozen stream—
If only those early settlers had been interested in skis
And felled just a few of those trees!
But they cared naught for slopes, the dopes,
And only pushed their ploughs
In places suitable for cows to browse.
So must the modern skier oft bewail
The total lack of navigable trail.

JOAN RYS, *O Canada*

Well Trained

It's all a question of looking good. The first place to look good is on the ski train. When leaving for a ski resort, the non-skier should be completely dressed in ski pants, ski boots and goggles. The non-skier must remember that clothes make the skier, the skier doesn't make the clothes.

You don't have to carry any skis, but you should have two ski sticks with you. If you want to look good before the train starts, you can practise low crouches, jump turns, parallel swings, Christiania stems on the train platform. This will impress everyone on the station and you'll be a legend before you even get on the train.

Once aboard, you can either wax your ski sticks or study snow bulletins. It's all right to strike up conversations about ski-ing with other passengers provided they are not going to the same resort . . .

When he arrives at the ski resort, the non-skier has to be very

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careful. If there is snow on the ground he may be in trouble. One method of solving the problem would be to jump off the train from the top step and then scream, " My ankle, my ankle, I think I broke it! " ART BUCHWALD, *I Chose Caviar*

Nursery Slopes

Avenge O Lord thy slaughtered Saints, whose bones
Lie scattered on the Alpine mountains cold . . .

JOHN MILTON

Christie, Sapristi!

For changing direction, the Christie is what you need to know . . . Assuming a half crouch, lean forward until you feel a definite drag at the seams of your navy berry gabardine downhill trousers, then lash out with both ski poles. In this way you may turn right, left, or upside down. W. F. MIKSH

Flying Finn

Wilhelm Lüdecke the prudent,
Handsome merchant out of Gotland
Carved a ski throughout the autumn
Which he fashioned for his left foot,
And the right ski one long winter
Underneath with skin he covered;
Well and truly wrought the left ski,
Clad with the skin the shorter right ski.
Smooth on snow the left ski glided
Swift as arrow, smooth as butter;
While the right ski on the windcrust
Skipped like any hare rejoicing.

Rune Seven, Old Kalewala

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Glacier

Snow wind whipt to ice
Under a hard sun
Stream-runnels curdled hoar
Crackle, cannot run.

RICHARD HUGHES, *Winter*

From Iceland's Greasy Mountains

The winter rush is on, but where and when is the best time to go? Each year the mountains seem to get more crowded, and hopes of finding that piece of untracked snow dwindle. Fortunately new places are opening up all the time, and there are some new countries to choose from, too—from Kashmir to Iceland. The world has gone ski-ing mad, even Russia claims to have 2,200 resorts, but at present no tourists are allowed in them . . .

HILARY LAING

Help!

The freshness, the freedom, the farness—
O God! how I'm stuck on it all—

R. W. SERVICE, *The Spell of the Yukon*

Snow-Drop

Charles had to go farther afield for his ski-ing; but on the higher slopes he could still find the delicious " spring snow " that some skiers prefer to any other sort—snow which has frozen hard during the night and is softened on the surface by the heat of the sun. The time came when, towards the end of a run, he would have to steer his way among patches of brown turf between the snowdrifts; and each patch of turf had broken into an efflorescence of tiny white and purple crocuses, springing like little flames of new life straight from the soil.

Thomas chanted a parody of Marvell now, when he took a toss:

Stumbling on crocus as I pass,
Snared in my skis, I fall on grass.

MONICA CURTIS, *Landslide*

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DARK AND GOLDEN-EYED

This was the moment Mars had waited for

BY RAY BRADBURY

THE rocket metal cooled in the meadow winds. Its lid gave a bulging *pop*. From its clock interior stepped a man, a woman, and three children. The other passengers whispered away across the Martian meadow, leaving the man alone among his family. The man felt his hair flutter and the tissues of his body draw tight as if he was standing at the centre of a vacuum. His wife, before him, seemed almost to whirl away in smoke. The children, small seeds, might at any instant be sown to all the Martian climes.

The children looked up at him, as people look to the sun to tell what time of their life it is. His face was cold.

"What's wrong?" asked his wife.

"Let's get back on the rocket."

"Go back to Earth?"

"Yes. Listen!"

The wind blew as if to flake away their identities. At any moment the Martian air might draw his soul from him, as marrow comes from a white bone. He felt submerged in a chemical that could dissolve his intellect and burn away his past.

They looked at Martian hills that time had worn with a crushing pressure of years. They saw the old cities, lost like thin children in their meadows, lying like children's delicate bones among the blowing lakes of grass.

"It's too late, Harry," said his wife. "We've come thirty-five million miles or more." The children with their dandelion hair hollered at the deep dome of Martian sky. There was no answer but the racing hiss of wind through the stiff grass.

He picked up the luggage in his cold hands. "Here we go," he said—a man standing on the edge of a sea, ready to wade in and be drowned.

They walked into town.

Their name was Bittering. Harry and his wife, Cora; Tom,

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Laura, and David. They built a small, white cottage and ate good breakfasts there, but the fear was never gone. It lay with Mr. Bittering and Mrs. Bittering, a third unbidden partner at every midnight talk, at every dawn wakening.

"I feel like a salt crystal," he often said, "in a mountain stream, being washed away. We don't belong here. We're Earth people. This is Mars. It was meant for Martians. For heaven's sake, Cora, let's buy tickets for home."

But she only shook her head. "One day the atom bomb will destroy Earth. Then we'll be safe here."

"Safe and insane."

Tick-tock, seven o'clock, sang the voice clock; *time to get up.* And they did.

He checked every detail of his surroundings each morning—warm hearth, potted blood-geraniums—as if he expected something to be amiss. The morning paper was toast-warm from the six a.m. Earth rocket. He broke its seal and tilted it at his breakfast plate. He forced himself to be convivial.

"Colonial days all over again," he declared. "Why, in another year there'll be a million Earthmen on Mars. Big cities, everything. They said we'd fail, said the Martians would resent our invasion. But did we find any Martians? Not a living soul. Oh, we found their empty cities, but no one in them. Right?"

A river of wind submerged the house. When the windows ceased rattling, Mr. Bittering swallowed and looked at the children.

"I don't know," said David. "Maybe there are Martians that we can't see. Sometimes, at night, I think I hear 'em. I hear the wind. The sand hits my window. I get scared. And I see those towns right up in the mountains where the Martians lived a long time ago. I think I see things moving in those towns, Papa. And I wonder if those Martians *mind* us living here. I wonder if they won't do something to us for coming here."

"Nonsense." Mr. Bittering looked out of the windows. "We're clean, decent people." He looked at his children. "All dead cities have some kind of ghosts in them. Memories, I mean." He stared at the hills. "You see a staircase and you wonder what the Martians who climbed it looked like. You see Martian paintings and you wonder what the painter was like. You make a little ghost in your mind, a memory. It's quite natural. Imagination." He stopped. "You haven't been prowling up in those ruins, have you?"

"No, Papa." David looked at his shoes.

"See that you stay away from them. Pass the jam."

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"Just the same," said David, "I bet something happens."

Something happened that afternoon.

Laura stumbled through the settlement, crying. She dashed blindly on to the verandah.

"Mother, Father—the war, Earth!" she sobbed. "A radio flash has just come. Atom bombs hit Earth cities. All the space rockets blown up. No more rockets to Mars, ever."

"Oh, Harry!" The mother held on to her husband and daughter.

"Are you sure, Laura?" asked her father quietly.

Laura wept. "We're stranded on Mars for ever and ever."

For a long time there was only the sound of the wind in the late afternoon.

Alone, thought Bittering. Only a thousand of us here. No way back. No way. No way. Sweat poured from his face and his hands and his body; he was drenched in the hotness of his fear. He wanted to strike Laura, cry, "No, you're lying! The rockets will come back." Instead, he stroked Laura's head against him and said, "The rockets will get through, some day."

"In five years, perhaps. It takes that long to build one. Father, Father, what shall we do?"

"Go about our business, of course. Raise crops and children. Wait. Keep things going until the war ends and the rockets come again."

The two boys stepped out on to the verandah.

"Children," he said, sitting there, looking beyond them, "I've something to tell you."

"We know," they said . . .

Bittering wandered into the garden to stand alone in his fear. As long as the rockets had spun a silver web across space, he had been able to accept Mars. For he had always told himself, Tomorrow, if I want to, I can buy a ticket and go back to Earth.

But now: the web gone, the rockets lying in jigsaw heaps of molten girder and unsnaked wire. Earth people left to the strangeness of Mars, the cinnamon dusts and wine airs, to be baked like gingerbread shapes in Martian summers, put into harvested storage by Martian winters. What would happen to him, to the others? This was the moment Mars had waited for. Now it would devour them.

He got down on his knees in the flowerbed, a spade in his nervous hands. Work, he thought, work and forget.

He glanced up from the garden to the Martian mountains. He thought of the proud, old Martian names that had once been on those peaks. Earthmen, dropping from the sky, had gazed upon

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hills, rivers, Martian seas left nameless in spite of names. Once Martians had built cities, named cities; climbed mountains, named mountains; sailed seas, named seas. Mountains melted, seas drained, cities tumbled. In spite of this, the Earthmen had felt a silent guilt at giving new names to these ancient hills and valleys.

Nevertheless, man lives by symbol and label. The names were given.

Mr. Bittering felt very alone in his garden under the Martian sun, anachronism bent here, planting Earth flowers in a wild soil.

Think. Keep thinking. Different things. Keep your mind free of Earth, the atom war, the lost rockets.

He perspired. He glanced about. No one watching. He removed his tie. Pretty daring, he thought. First your coat off, now your tie. He hung it neatly on a peach tree he had imported as a sapling from Massachusetts.

He returned to his philosophy of names and mountains. The Earthmen had changed names. Now there were Roosevelt Seas, Ford Hills, Rockefeller Rivers on Mars. It wasn't right. The American settlers had shown wisdom, using old, Indian prairie names: Wisconsin, Minnesota, Idaho, Ohio, Utah, Milwaukee, Waukegan, Osseo. The old names, the old meanings.

Staring at the mountains wildly, he thought, Are you up there? All the dead ones, you Martians? Well, here we are, alone, cut off. Come down, move us out! We're helpless.

The wind blew a shower of peach blossoms.

He put out his sun-browned hand, gave a small cry. He touched the blossoms, picked them up. He turned them, he touched them again and again. Then he shouted for his wife.

"Cora!"

She appeared at a window. He ran to her.

"Cora, these blossoms!"

She handled them.

"Do you see? They're different. They've changed. They're not peach blossoms any longer."

"They look all right to me," she said.

"They're not. They're *wrong*! I can't tell how. An extra petal, a leaf, something, the colour, the smell."

The children ran out in time to see their father hurrying about the garden, pulling up radishes, onions, and carrots.

"Cora, come and look!"

They handled the onions, the radishes, the carrots and went over them.

"Do they look like carrots?"

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"Yes . . . No." She hesitated. "I don't know."

"They've changed."

"Perhaps."

"You know they have! Onions but not onions, carrots but not carrots. Taste: the same but different. Smell: not like it used to be." He felt his heart pounding, and he was afraid. He dug his fingers into the earth. "Cora, what's happening? What is it? We've got to get away from this." He ran across the garden. Each tree felt his touch. "The roses. The roses. They're turning green!"

And they stood looking at the green roses.

Two days later, Tom came running. "Come and see the cow. I was milking her and I saw it. Come on!"

They stood in the shed and looked at their one cow.

She was growing a third horn.

And the lawn in front of their house very quietly and slowly was colouring itself, like spring violets. Seed from Earth, but growing up a soft purple.

"We must get away," said Bittering. "If we eat this stuff we shall change—who knows to what? I can't let it happen. There's only one thing to do. Burn this food!"

"It's not poisoned."

"But it is. Subtly, very subtly. A little bit. A very little bit. We mustn't touch it."

He looked with dismay at their house. "Even the house. The wind's done something to it. The air's burnt it. The fog at night. The boards, all warped out of shape. It's not an Earthman's house any more."

"Oh, your imagination!"

He put on his coat and tie. "I'm going into town. We've got to do something now. I'll be back."

"Wait, Harry," his wife cried.

But he was gone.

In the town, on the shadowy step of the grocery shop, the men sat with their hands on their knees, conversing with great leisure and ease.

Mr. Bittering wanted to fire a pistol in the air.

What are you doing, you fools? he thought. Sitting here. You've heard the news—we're stranded on this planet. Well, move! Aren't you frightened? Aren't you afraid? What are you going to do?

"Hullo, Harry," said everyone.

"Look," he said to them, "you did hear the news the other day, didn't you?"

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They nodded and laughed. "Sure. Sure, Harry."

"What are you going to do about it?"

"Do, Harry, do? What can we do?"

"Build a rocket."

"A rocket, Harry? To go back to all that trouble? Oh, Harry!"

"But you *must* want to go back. Have you noticed the peach blossoms, the onions, the grass?"

"Why, yes, Harry, yes, we did," said one of the men.

"Doesn't it scare you?"

"Can't recall that it did, much, Harry."

"Idiots!"

"Now, Harry."

Bittering wanted to cry. "You've got to work with me. If we stay here, we'll all change. The air. Don't you smell it? Something in the air. A Martian virus, maybe; some seed, or a pollen. Listen to me."

They stared at him.

"Sam," he said to one of them.

"Yes, Harry?"

"Will you help me to build a rocket?"

"Harry, I've got a whole load of metal and some blueprints. If you want to work in my metal shop on a rocket, you're welcome. I'll sell you that metal for five hundred dollars. You should be able to construct a right pretty rocket if you work alone—in about thirty years."

Everyone laughed.

"Don't laugh."

Sam looked at him with quiet good humour.

"Sam," Bittering said. "Your eyes—"

"What about them, Harry?"

"Weren't they grey?"

"Well now, I don't remember."

"They were, weren't they?"

"Why do you ask, Harry?"

"Because now they're kind of yellow-coloured."

"Is that so, Harry?" Sam said casually.

"And you're taller and thinner—"

"You might be right, Harry."

"Sam, you shouldn't have yellow eyes."

"Harry, what colour eyes have you got?" Sam asked.

"My eyes? They're blue, of course."

"Here you are, Harry." Sam handed him a pocket mirror. "Take a look at yourself."

Mr. Bittering hesitated, and then raised the mirror to his face.

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There were little, very dim flecks of new gold captured in the blue of his eyes.

"Now look what you've done," said Sam, a moment later. "You've broken my mirror."

Harry Bittering moved into the metal shop and began to build the rocket. Men stood in the open door and talked and joked without raising their voices. Once in a while they gave him a hand to lift something. But mostly they just idled and watched him with their yellowing eyes.

"It's supper-time, Harry," they said.

His wife appeared with his supper in a wicker basket.

"I won't touch it," he said. "I'll eat only food from our deep-freeze. Food that came from Earth. Nothing from our garden."

His wife stood watching him. "You can't build a rocket."

"I worked in a engineering shop once, when I was twenty. I know metal. Once I get it started, the others will help," he said, not looking at her, laying out the blueprints.

"Harry, Harry," she said, helplessly.

"We've got to get away, Cora. We've *got* to!"

The nights were full of wind that blew down the empty, moonlit sea-meadows past the little, white chess cities lying for their twelve-thousandth year in the shallows. In the Earthmen's settlement, the Bittering house shook with a feeling of change.

Lying abed, Mr. Bittering felt his bones shifted, shaped, melted like gold. His wife, lying beside him, was dark from many sunny afternoons. Dark she was, and golden, burnt almost black by the sun, sleeping, and the children metallic in their beds, and the wind roaring forlorn and changing through the old peach trees, the violet grass, shaking out green rose petals.

The fear would not be stopped. It had his throat and heart. It dripped in a wetness of the arm and the temple and the trembling palm.

A green star rose in the east.

A strange word emerged from Mr. Bittering's lips.

"Iorrt. Iorrt." He repeated it.

It was a Martian word. He knew no Martian.

In the middle of the night he rose and telephoned to Simpson, the archaeologist.

"Simpson, what does the word, Iorrt mean?"

"That's the old Martian word for our planet, Earth. Why?"

"No special reason."

The telephone slipped from his hand.

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"Hullo, hullo, hullo, hullo," it kept saying while he sat gazing out at the green star. "Bittering? Harry, are you there?"

The days were full of metal sound. He laid the frame of the rocket with the reluctant help of three indifferent men. He grew very tired in an hour or so and had to sit down.

"The altitude," laughed a man.

"Are you *eating*?" asked another.

"I'm eating," he said angrily.

"From your deep-freeze?"

"Yes."

"You're getting thinner, Harry."

"I'm not."

"And taller."

"Liar!"

His wife took him aside a few days later. "Harry, I've used up all the food in the deep-freeze. There's nothing left. I'll have to make sandwiches using food grown on Mars."

He sat down heavily.

"You must eat," she said. "You're weak."

"Yes," he said.

He took a sandwich, opened it, looked at it, and began to nibble at it.

"And take the rest of the day off," she said. "It's hot. The children want to swim in the canals and hike. Please come with us."

"I can't waste time. This is a crisis!"

"Just for an hour," she urged. "A swim'll do you good."

He rose, sweating. "All right, all right. Leave me alone. I'll come."

The sun was hot, the day quiet. There was only an immense staring burn upon the land. They moved along the canal, the father, the mother, the racing children in their swimsuits. They stopped and ate meat sandwiches. He saw their skin baking brown. And he saw the yellow eyes of his wife and his children, eyes that were never yellow before. A few tremblings shook him, but were carried off in waves of pleasant heat as he lay in the sun. He was too tired to be afraid.

"Cora, how long have your eyes been yellow?"

She was bewildered. "Always, I suppose."

"They didn't change from brown in the last three months?"

She bit her lips. "No. Why do you ask?"

"Never mind."

They sat there.

"The children's eyes," he said. "They're yellow, too."

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"Sometimes growing children's eyes change colour."

"Maybe *we're* children, too. At least to Mars. That's a thought." He laughed. "Think I'll swim."

They leapt into the canal water, and he let himself sink down and down to the bottom like a golden statue and lie there in green silence.

All was water, quiet and deep; all was peace. He felt the steady, slow current drift him easily.

If I lie here long enough, he thought, the water will work and eat away my flesh until the bones show like coral. Just my skeleton left. And then the water can build on that skeleton—green things, deep-water things, red things, yellow things. Change. Change. Slow, deep, silent change. And isn't that what it is up there?

He saw the sky submerged above him, the sun made Martian by atmosphere and time and space.

Up there, a big river, he thought, a Martian river, all of us lying deep in it, in our pebble houses, in our sunken boulder houses, like crayfish hidden, and the water washing away our old bodies and lengthening the bones and . . .

He let himself drift up through the soft light.

Tom sat on the edge of the canal, regarding his father seriously. "Utha," he said.

"What?" asked his father.

The boy smiled. "You know. Utha's the Martian word for father."

"Where did you learn it?"

"I don't know. Somewhere. Utha!"

"What do you want?"

The boy hesitated. "I—I want to change my name."

"Change it?"

"Yes."

His mother swam over. "What's wrong with Tom for a name?"

Tom fidgeted. "The other day you called, Tom, Tom, Tom. I didn't even hear. I said to myself that's not my name. I've a new name I want to use."

Mr. Bittering held to the side of the canal, his body cold and his heart pounding slowly. "What is this new name?"

"Linnl. Isn't that a good name? Can I use it? Can't I, please?"

Mr. Bittering put his hand to his head. He thought of the rocket, himself working alone, himself alone even among his family, so alone.

He heard his wife say, "Why not?"

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He heard himself say, " Yes, you can use it."

" Yaaa! " screamed the boy. " I'm Linnl, Linnl."

Racing down the meadowlands, he danced and shouted.

Mr. Bittering looked at his wife. " Why did we do that? "

" I don't know," she said. " It just seemed a good idea."

They walked into the hills. They strolled on old, mosaic paths, beside still-pumping fountains. The paths were covered with a thin film of cool water all summer long. You kept your bare feet cool all the day, splashing as in a creek, wading.

They came to a small, deserted Martian villa with a good view of the valley. It was on top of a hill. Blue-marble halls, large murals, a swimming pool. It was refreshing in this hot summertime. The Martians hadn't believed in large cities.

" How nice," said Mrs. Bittering, " if we could move up here to this villa for the summer."

" Come on," he said. " We're going back to town. There's work to be done on the rocket."

But as he worked that night, the thought of the cool, blue-marble villa entered his mind. As the hours passed, the rocket seemed less important.

In the flow of days and weeks, the rocket receded and dwindled. The old fever was gone. It frightened him to think he had let it slip this way. But somehow the heat, the air, the working conditions . . . He heard the men murmuring on the verandah of his metal shop.

" Everyone's going. You heard? "

" All going. That's right."

Bittering came out. " Going where? " He saw a couple of trucks, loaded with children and furniture, drive down the dusty street.

" Up to the villa," said the man.

" Yeah, Harry. I'm going. So is Sam. Aren't you, Sam? "

" That's right, Harry. What about you? "

" I've got work to do here."

" Work! You can finish that rocket in the autumn, when it's cooler."

He took a breath. " I've got the frame all set up."

" In the autumn would be better." Their voices were lazy in the heat.

" Got to work," he said.

" Autumn," they reasoned. And they sounded so sensible, so right.

Autumn would be best, he thought. Plenty of time then.

No! cried part of himself, deep down, put away, locked tight, suffocating. No! No!

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" In the autumn," he said.

" Come on, Harry," they all said.

" Yes," he said, feeling his flesh melt in the hot, liquid air. " Yes, in the autumn. I'll begin work again then."

" I've got a villa near the Tirra canal," said someone.

" You mean the Roosevelt canal, don't you? "

" Tirra. The old Martian name."

" But on the map—"

" Forget the map. It's Tirra now. Now, I've found a place in the Pillan mountains—"

" You mean the Rockefeller range," said Bittering.

" I mean the Pillan mountains," said Sam.

" Yes," said Bittering, buried in the hot, swarming air. " The Pillan mountains."

Everyone worked at loading the shooting-brake in the hot, still afternoon of the next day.

Laura, Tom, and David carried packages. Or, as they preferred to be known, Ttil, Linnl, and Werr carried packages.

The furniture was abandoned in the little, white cottage.

" It looked perfect in Boston," said the mother. " And here in the cottage. But up at the villa? No. We'll get it when we come back in the autumn."

Bittering himself was quiet.

" I've some ideas on furniture for the villa," he said after a time. " Big, lazy furniture."

" What about your Encyclopedia? You're taking it with you, surely? "

Mr. Bittering glanced away. " I'll come and get it next week."

They turned to their daughter. " What about your New York dresses? "

The bewildered girl stared. " Why, I don't want them any more."

They shut off the gas, the water, they locked the doors, and walked away. Father peered into the shooting-brake.

" Gosh, we're not taking much," he said. " Considering all we brought to Mars, this is only a handful."

He started the engine.

Looking at the small, white cottage for a long moment, he was filled with a desire to rush to it, touch it, say good-bye to it, for he felt as if he was going away on a long journey, leaving something to which he could never quite return, never understand again.

Just then Sam and his family drove past in another brake.

" Hi, Bittering! Here we go! "

The shooting brake swung down the ancient highway out of

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town. There were sixty others travelling in the same direction. The town filled with a silent, heavy dust from their passage. The canal waters lay blue in the sun, and a quiet wind moved in the strange trees.

"Good-bye, town," said Mr. Bittering.

"Good-bye, good-bye," said the family, waving to it.

They did not look back again.

Summer burnt the canals dry. Summer moved like flame upon the meadows. In the empty Earth settlement, the painted houses flaked and peeled. Rubber tyres upon which children had swung in backyards hung suspended like stopped clock pendulums in the blazing air.

At the metal shop, the rocket frame began to rust.

In the quiet autumn, Mr. Bittering stood, very dark now, very golden-eyed, upon the slope above his villa, looking at the valley.

"It's time to go back," said Cora.

"Yes, but we're not going," he said quietly. "There's nothing there any more."

"Your books," she said. "Your fine clothes. Your illes and your fine ior uele rre," she said.

"The town's empty. No one's going back," he said. "There's no reason to, none at all."

The daughter wove tapestries and the sons played songs on ancient flutes and pipes; laughter echoing in the marble villa.

Mr. Bittering gazed at the Earth settlement in the low valley. "Such odd, such ridiculous houses the Earth people built."

"They didn't know any better," his wife mused. "Such ugly people. I'm glad they've gone."

They both looked at each other, startled by all they had just finished saying. They laughed.

"Where did they go?" he wondered. He glanced at his wife. She was golden and slender as his daughter. She looked at him, and he seemed almost as young as their eldest son.

"I don't know," she said.

"We'll go back to town maybe next year, or the year after, or the year after that," he said calmly. "Now—I'm warm. How about having a swim?"

They turned their backs to the valley. Arm in arm they walked silently down a path of clear, running spring water.

Five years later, a rocket fell out of the sky. It lay steaming in the valley. Men leapt out of it, shouting.

"We won the war on Earth. We're here to rescue you."

But the American-built town of cottages, peach trees, and

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theatres was silent. They found a half-finished rocket frame, rusting in an empty shop.

The rocket men searched the hills. The captain established headquarters in an abandoned bar. His lieutenant came back to report. "The town's empty, but we found native life in the hills, sir. Dark people. Yellow eyes. Martians. Very friendly. We talked a bit, not much, They learn English fast. I'm sure our relations with them will be most friendly, sir."

"Dark, eh?" mused the captain. "How many?"

"Six to eight hundred, I'd say, living in those marble ruins in the hills, sir. Tall, healthy. Beautiful women."

"Did they tell you what became of the men and women who built this Earth settlement, Lieutenant?"

"They hadn't the foggiest notion of what happened to this town or its people."

"Strange. You think those Martians killed them?"

"They look surprisingly peaceful. The chances are a plague did this town in, sir."

"Perhaps. I suppose this is one of those mysteries we'll never solve. One of those mysteries you read about."

The captain looked at the room, the dusty windows, the blue mountains rising beyond, the canals moving in the light, and he heard the soft wind in the air. He shivered. Then, recovering, he tapped a large, fresh map he had drawing-pinned to the top of an empty table.

"Lots to be done, Lieutenant." His voice droned on and quietly on as the sun sank behind the blue hills. "New settlements. Mining sites, minerals to be looked for. Bacteriological specimens taken. The work, all the work. All the old records were lost. We'll have a job of remapping to do, renaming the mountains and rivers and such. Calls for a little imagination.

"What do you think of naming those mountains the Lincoln Mountains, this canal the Washington Canal, those hills—we can name those hills after you, Lieutenant. And you, as a favour, might name a town after me. Why not make this Einstein Valley, and farther over . . . are you listening, Lieutenant?"

The lieutenant snapped his gaze from the blue colour and the quiet mist of the hills far beyond the town.

"What? Oh yes, sir!"

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'ARTY EATERS?

Cookery is the only unselfish art

ANDRE L. SIMON

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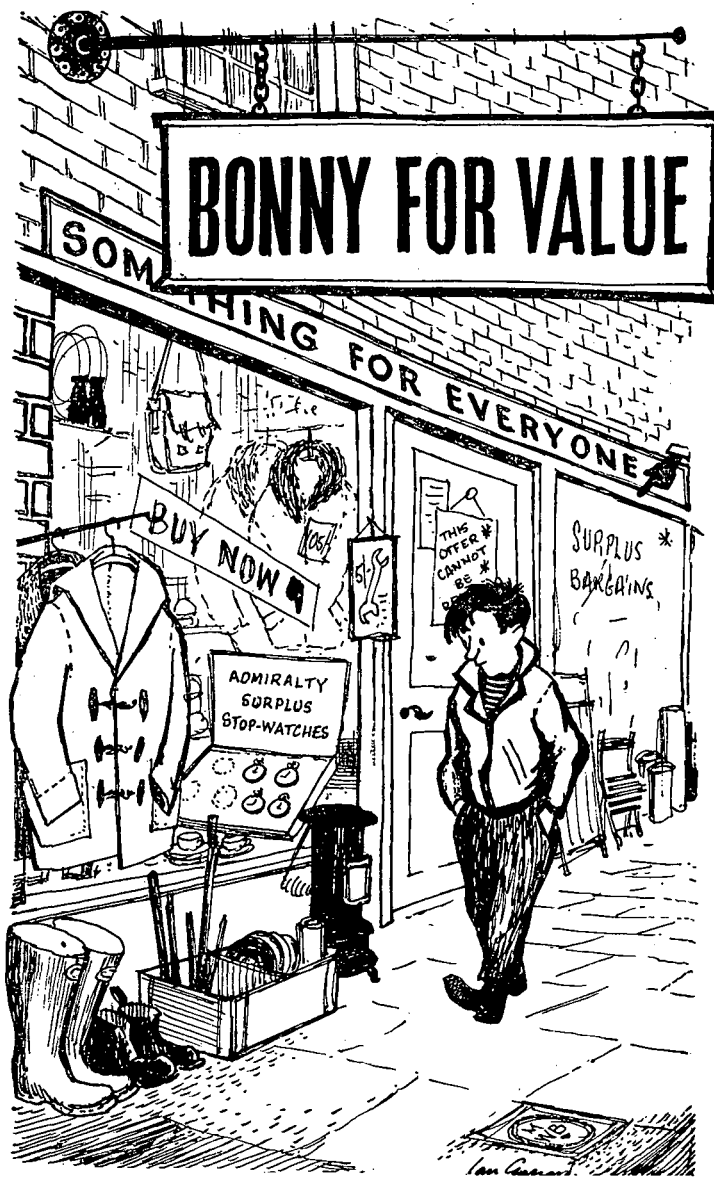

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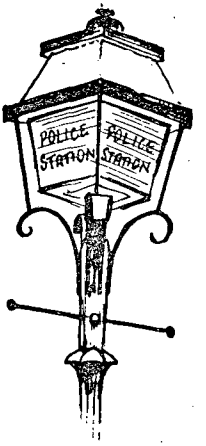
A NEW PATRICK PETRELLA STORY



BY MICHAEL GILBERT

MR. CORNSTALK, an employee of British Railways working in the main line signal-box at Waterloo, was on early shift; which meant that he had to be on duty by five o'clock each morning, leaving his house in Watchet Street, S.E. shortly before half past four. As he ran down his front steps he noticed that the side door of Mr. Prince's shop opposite was standing ajar. Now Mr. Prince, like all pawnbrokers and jewellers, was a most meticulous locker-up. His windows were covered, each night, with heavy shutters which were bolted on the inside and padlocked on the outside. His front and side door were locked and double locked.

A glance convinced Mr. Cornstalk that something was amiss. There was a newly-sawn hole in one of the panels of the door about halfway up, and through it he could see the remains of the heavy lock dangling from a couple of screws. He wondered what to do about it. The last thing he wanted was to make himself late for work. On the other hand, Mr. Prince was an old friend. A compromise occurred to him. He knew Mr. Prince's home telephone number, and there was a kiosk on the corner.

All of which accounts for the fact that Detective Inspector Patrick Petrella and Detective Sergeant Croft, both showing signs of men who have been urgently dragged from their beds, were in Watchet Street with the outraged Mr. Prince before half past five had struck.

"It's not the stuff that's gone I mind about so much," said Mr. Prince. "Of course, it's not properly covered, but I should get something for it—" From which Petrella, who was not inexperienced in these matters, gathered that Mr. Prince was heavily over-insured. "It's all this mess and damage. Looks like he done it on purpose. Why did he have to wreck the counter, for instance? There wasn't any call to do that."

He pointed to the old mahogany surface, polished by fifty

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years of care and use, now criss-crossed by a dozen burns. In some of them were embedded the ashes of the cigarette that had been laid down there.

" I'm afraid it's one of the things burglars do," said Petrella. " Wanton damage. It sort of relieves their feelings."

" Tchah," said Mr. Prince.

" It sometimes helps us catch 'em, too. We might be able to bounce this one if we're quick. Get on to Scotland Yard, Croft, and see if the C.R.O. can turn up something for us."

" Those boys at Central," said Sergeant Croft, " they're Civil Servants. They come on duty at harpass nine and they go home at harpass five."

" I think," said Petrella patiently, " that they've got some arrangement for emergencies. If you get hold of the Night Duty Officer he'll tell you all about it."

He spoke patiently because he had not found himself getting on as well as he should have done with Sergeant Croft, who was over fifty and, though sound on essentials, beginning to go sour from lack of promotion.

The Criminal Records Office, in Petrella's experience, answered your inquiries in one of two ways. Either it was feeling cautious, in which case it gave you a list of a hundred and fifty " possibles " without expressing any particular preference for any of them, or else it made bold and inspired guesses. That morning it was in Delphic form. His inquiry produced a single, prompt, and red-hot tip.

" Carson (William) alias Cranston, alias Causton, alias Crawford. Previous convictions—" there were a lot of those, mostly for shop-breaking—" method of entry, side or backdoor, panel drilled, hole cut with keyhole or taper saw, lock or catch-plate levered off . . . chain smoker when at work . . . uses a bicycle for transport. Last known address, 17, Marsh Close, S.E.11."

The latest date stamp on the report was three months old. Carson might have moved half a dozen times since then. Professional burglars were birds of passage. On the other hand, he might not.

He said to Sergeant Croft, " Get the car, we're going visiting."

It was then twenty past seven. At half past seven the door of No. 17, Marsh Close was being opened to them by a stout lady in a kimono. She said, " Good morning, Sergeant." There was no need to inquire their business. Like head-lice and debt-collectors, police were endemic in Marsh Close.

" He's second floor back," she said. " Don't you boys make more noise than you must. The lady in the next room's expecting her first and she needs her sleep."

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Petrella said, " Did you happen to notice when Carson got in? "

" He's got his key," said the old lady indifferently. " I don't keep tabs on him. Matter of fact, I did think I heard him go up about half an hour ago. Probably working nights. He'll be in bed by now."

Carson was not only in bed, he was asleep, a happy smile on his face, and enveloped in a light but not unpleasant aura of Scotch whisky.

" Sleeping like a babby," said Sergeant Croft. " No night starvation there."

" Might have a look at his shoes and clothes before we disturb him," said Petrella.

Carson, brought back to the land of reality, was unsurprised by their visit and unresentful.

" Do the bed first," he said, " then I can get back in it."

They found nothing. Not even a saw blade, a screwdriver, or a chisel. By the time they had finished, Carson was asleep again. The ambulance came for the woman next door as they were leaving, and they followed her down the stairs, flushed and important with impending maternity.

After breakfast, Sergeant Croft brought in the night reports from the uniformed branch.

" No wonder ol' Carson was sleepy," he said. " He must've had quite a night."

Petrella read, in the careful, boyish handwriting of Constable Warren—

At 6.50 a.m. I stopped a bicyclist at the corner of Craigavon Street and Water Street. I recognised him as a man named Carson with previous convictions for house- and shop-breaking. There was a canvas bag fastened to the carrier of the bicycle. In view of his record I asked Carson if he had any objection to me examining the bag. He said, Go ahead. I found the bag to be empty . . .

" There's something wrong with those times," said Petrella. " Carson was away from Watchet Street by half past four—"

" He wouldn't leave it quite as late as that," said Croft. " If he'd cased the job properly he must've known that—What was that railwayman's name? Beanstalk—left his house at half past four."

" All right. Say four o'clock. The constable on the beat reported all correct at two o'clock. That gives him two hours for the job. Break the door. Open two steel cabinets."

" I couldn't do it," agreed Croft, " but Carson's an expert. Two hours is about right."

" Well," said Petrella, " he leaves at four on his bicycle. Ten

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to seven he turns up in Craigavon Street. How far can you go on a bicycle in nearly three hours?"

"Thirty miles."

"That's what I mean. It doesn't make sense. Carson's got a fence lined up. Probably somewhere handy. His one idea's to get rid of the stuff—and his kit, too—as quick as he damned well can, and get back to bed. If possible, before it's light. What's he doing hanging round at ten to seven drawing attention to himself?"

"Perhaps he couldn't contact the fence."

"I don't believe it. It stands out a mile that he'd got all the details fixed up beforehand. Get someone on to finding out if anyone actually saw Carson between, say, half past four and half past six."

It was an unexplained fact. A single, awkward piece that would not fit into an otherwise smooth pattern.

The matter might easily have been shelved and forgotten, had not Petrella's mid-morning cup of coffee brought with it Detective Superintendent Benjamin.

The Superintendent operated from the main divisional station at Causeway, and was in charge of all Criminal Investigations in X Division, that roaring jungle of factories, cinemas, shops, pubs, and railway yards which fills the main loop of the River Thames and spills itself southward towards New Cross and the Kentish hills. He was a tall, thin Lincolnshireman, and Petrella liked what he had so far seen of him. Particularly he appreciated the fact that he had been left almost alone in his first three months at Gabriel Street sub-station.

They talked shop for a few minutes, but it was clear that the Superintendent had come to say something, and at last, without more ado, he said it.

"Do you own a private bank account?"

"Yes," said Petrella. "I've had one for about three years."

"How often do you see a bank statement?"

"I don't know. I should think about once a year. They don't bother you much unless you're overdrawn."

"I'd advise you to ask for it once a month."

Petrella stared at him.

"Did it never occur to you to wonder why your predecessor, a young and enterprising chap like Jimmy Carver, should have been moved from a divisional post here and given a clerical job at Scotland Yard?"

"I never thought about it at all," said Petrella. "To tell you the truth, I was too pleased at getting promotion and a station of my own."

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" Can't blame you," said Benjamin. He paused so long that Petrella thought he might have changed his mind about what he was going to say. Then he said, " We'd been having a lot of trouble with shop-breaking. Jewellers and such like, chiefly. Not tiaras or priceless matching pearls, but signet rings, watches, cigarette lighters. A good profit in it if you handle it in bulk, and someone was doing just that. We knew the operators pretty well, but we could never catch them with anything on 'em. We thought we knew the organiser, too. A man called Bonny."

The name stirred a memory.

" Bonny for Value," said Petrella. " Doesn't he run a shop in Harp Street? Calls itself, ' Government Surplus.' Sells almost everything."

" That's him. And a shop like that might be fine cover for a receiver, don't you think? That was our first idea, too. But it didn't turn out like that. There are depths in Mr. Bonny. Depths beyond depths."

" You'd be able to check on the stuff he was offering."

" We had stooges go in and buy things, which we traced back to the retailer and the maker. That was routine."

" And it was all good stuff."

" I wouldn't say it was good stuff," said the Superintendent. " But it certainly wasn't stolen—at least, not by our records. Some of it came from abroad, and was difficult to trace. Some was salvage, sold up in job lots by the insurance company that had had to pay out on a fire claim. Some was bankrupt stock. That sort of thing."

" But legitimate."

" Oh yes. One parcel, for instance, we traced back to its actual sale, by order of the Sheriff's Court in Inverness. Another lot came from Cardiff. He has nation-wide connections, has our Mr. Bonny."

" Might he be running a legitimate business in his shop, and a receiving end at his house? But, of course, you'd have thought of that."

" Yes," said the Superintendent. " We thought of that. And we kept his house under general observation. It's a big, rambling old place, in half an acre of garden, up in Gosselin Park."

" Five minutes from Craigavon Street."

" That's right. Why? "

" It fits in with something that happened this morning," said Petrella. " Please go on, sir."

" Most of our suspects were seen in the neighbourhood from time to time. In the end I thought we had a strong enough case,

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and I got a warrant and organised a search, which I entrusted to your predecessor."

"And he found nothing?"

"There was nothing to find. Not when he made his search. I'm quite satisfied about that. Three months later, a rather disturbing fact came to light. A cheque for £50 had been paid into Inspector Carver's private bank account three days before the search. It was signed by Mr. Bonny. He said he had paid for some spare-time decorating and building work that Carver had done for him. Carver said he knew nothing about it. The trouble was, he'd drawn against it."

"He could do that without knowing it was there," said Petrella.

"Certainly he could. That's why I suggested you look at your own account monthly."

"I'll look at Mr. Bonny, too," said Petrella.

That afternoon he made his way down to Harp Street. Modesty was not one of Mr. Bonny's failings. From a clear fifty yards he could read the six-inch-high red letters, BONNY FOR VALUE; and in equally prominent style, the legend SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE. The triple windows of the shop were crammed with duffel coats, primus stoves, knee-length rubber boots, barometers, sets of spanners, a gross of signet rings, cards of fountain pens, balaclava helmets, crockery, camp-chairs, sun-glasses, socks. It was a dreamlike quartermaster's store.

As Petrella stood examining its riches, his eye was caught by a prominently-placed tray.

ADMIRALTY SURPLUS STOP-WATCHES, said the notice. *Buy now. This sacrifice cannot be repeated.*

Petrella felt in his pocket and fetched out a copy of the list he had compiled, in his own hand, in the early hours of that morning. His memory had not deceived him. One of the things Mr. Prince had lost had been a dozen precision-made stop-watches. He had valued them at £15 each.

Petrella pushed open the door and went in.

He had little doubt that the personage who came forward to serve him was Mr. Bonny himself. He was so red, so inflated, so genial, so pleased with himself that it could have been none other.

"A stop-watch?" he said. "You have a keen eye for a bargain, young man. I put a dozen in the window this morning, and—you can see for yourself—only five left. Four pounds ten apiece. Anyone in their senses would charge you five guineas. A wonderful chance."

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Petrella agreed with him. It seemed almost too good to be true. It was fortunate that he happened to have four pounds and some silver with him.

"Shall I wrap it, or is it for personal use, perhaps?"

"Oh, it's for me."

"Then you'll need a chain. Here we are. Heavy plated links. Five bob to anyone else. Four-and-sixpence to you."

Petrella settled for four-and-sixpence.

"A wonderful timekeeper," said Mr. Bonny. "With that watch, Inspector, you'll never be late on duty. Give my love to all the boys up at the station. Be seeing more of you, I hope. Good-bye for now."

"Good-bye," said Petrella. He had exactly fourpence left, in coppers, and he used it to telephone Gabriel Street for a car. Ten minutes later he was showing his watch, but not now very hopefully, to Mr. Prince.

"Not bad," said Mr. Prince. "No. It's not one of mine. It's not really what you'd call a jeweller's job. How much did you give for it? Four pounds ten? If you'd told me you wanted one I'd have picked you one up for about three fifteen wholesale."

Petrella drove back to Gabriel Street in silence. When he got there he went into his office, and reflected for ten whole minutes before lifting up the receiver and demanding an outside line. He dialled the private exchange number of New Scotland Yard and, when the operator answered, he asked to be put through to Detective Inspector Carver.

"No. I don't mind talking about it," said Carver, stirring his tea. "I'm gradually getting over the feeling of having been kicked in the stomach. If you land him, best of luck to you. He was too fast for me."

They had met, at Petrella's suggestion, in a first-storey tea shop which looks out on Big Ben and observes odd hours to accommodate police officers off duty.

"There was just enough in his story to make it look fishy. I do a bit of decorating in my spare time—round my own house and for friends. And Bonny had had a couple of rooms done up, but not by me."

"It seems to me," said Petrella, "that, now you don't have to endorse cheques, anyone can go round paying money into anyone's account."

"That's right," said Carver. "Then they said I'd drawn against it. What the hell! I never know what I've got in till I get a dirty letter from my bank manager, then I backpedal a bit."

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"Same as everyone. Tell me about the raid."

"If I'd been a betting man," said Carver, "and you'd asked me to lay some odds, I'd have said it was a hundred-to-one on we were going to strike oil that morning. We'd tightened up the observation on Bonny's house. It isn't an easy place to watch. Stands in a big garden, runs down to the railway at the back, and there's plenty of trees and bushes. You'd need twenty men to be sure no one came in or out. But we'd got a good spot nearly opposite the gate and we'd seen Dicky Bird go in at four o'clock the previous afternoon—and if *he* didn't do the Corner Store job, I don't know who did.

"And not only that. We pulled back at night, so's not to disturb him, but one of the men swears he saw Parsons sniffing round at six o'clock the next morning. And that means another packet of stuff was on its way in. Right?"

"Sounds quite firm to me," said Petrella.

"When I rang the bell at nine o'clock next morning I thought it was going to be a walkover. The stuff we were looking for—you couldn't push it down the crack between two floorboards, you follow me? It would have filled a couple of shoe-boxes. But when I saw old Bonny's face—I began to wonder. You know how bloody pleased with himself he looks?"

"Yes," said Petrella. He felt the weight of the watch in his pocket. "Yes, I know."

"He was grinning like a Cheshire cat. 'Come in, Inspector. Come in. What can I do for you this lovely morning?' Blah, blah, blah. I told him what we wanted, and he said, 'Go ahead.' I can promise you we didn't leave a couple of square inches unlooked. We'd a team from Central. Those boys can see through a foot of concrete. That house was clean, I'm telling you."

"The garden?"

"We'd a bit of luck there. It was a sharp, frosty morning. Inches of white hoar frost on the ground. You could see the prints on the path of the people who'd been up it—milkman and paperboy and so on. And no one had put a foot into the garden at all. If they had, they'd have left a trail—well, you couldn't have missed it."

"And what was your idea about it?"

Big Ben spoke out the quarter, and Carver waited till it had finished. Then he said, "My idea was the same as the Superintendent's. With one important difference. It stuck out a mile that Bonny had had a tip-off. He'd shifted the stuff Bird brought in the day before. And if we *were* right about Parsons—well, he'd just told him to come back later. Either way it adds up to the same answer. He knew he was going to be raided."

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" Who else was in it besides you? "

" The Superintendent organised it. He laid on the searchers for Scotland Yard. And I'd told Sergeant Croft."

" Yes," said Petrella. " I see."

It was after seven when he got back to Gabriel Street, but he pulled out all the files of the shop-breakings in the past six months and started to skim through them again. He soon found the one he wanted. A watch shop in the New Kent Road. There were reports on it from the investigating officer, who had soon concluded that it was the work of an Irish expert known as Patsy Parsons. The report was endorsed with the common form, " insufficient evidence to justify arrest." Petrella noted from the file that the breaking must have taken place after midnight, but before four o'clock when the patrolling constable had noticed that the night warning light had been extinguished and had gone in to investigate.

Four o'clock; six o'clock. Another unexplained gap. Even on foot it could hardly have taken more than half an hour for Patsy to get from the New Kent Road to Gosselin Park.

Petrella sat at his desk for a long time, the open files in front of him. He felt cold, and puzzled, and uncomfortable. And behind and beyond everything else he felt a growing anger. At Highside, where he had served first as a Constable and then as a Detective Sergeant, he had experienced the minor frustrations of a policeman's life, but he had never known this sort of shambles where the Superintendent distrusted the Inspector, the Inspector the Sergeant, and the Sergeant—who did Sergeant Croft suspect? If he were not guilty himself, he was probably going round nursing suspicions of someone else.

" Curse Mr. Bonny and all his works," said Petrella aloud to the silent room. " Curse a legal system that sets such store by presumptions of innocence, but allows no weight for presumptions of guilt. How the devil am I to get at him, triple-armed as he is in the armour of undetected crime? "

In the silence that succeeded this outburst the sudden shrilling of the telephone nearly frightened him out of his wits. He realised that a line must have been left through to his office when the exchange went off duty.

" Gabriel Street Station," he said. " Inspector Petrella."

" Oh, Inspector. How lucky I caught you. This is Mr. Bonny—you remember? "

" As a matter of fact I was just thinking about you."

" I wonder if you could come along? Something rather upsetting."

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Petrella drove himself up to Gosselin Park. The front gate was open, and the porch light was on. Mr. Bonny had the door open before he was out of the car.

"Quick work," he said. "Come in, come in. Along here on the right. This is my little snuggery." It struck Petrella as exactly the sort of room a man might have made up out of pictures in early numbers of *The Strand* Magazine, full of mahogany and red plush and Benares brass. The electric light fittings looked fifty years out of date, and there was a genuine tantalus on the table.

"Imagine my feelings," said Mr. Bonny. "I always go round, when I get home in the evenings. Had I neglected to do so . . . !"

He pulled aside the long, plum-coloured curtains which covered french windows leading to the garden. They had been equipped, Petrella saw, with an up-to-date burglar-proof lock, but a lock which didn't look quite right. He examined it more closely.

"Yes," he said. "Lucky you noticed it. Someone's taken it apart and put it back without the tongue. It isn't locking anything at all." He pushed on the window and it swung open. He stepped through and found himself on a small, tiled loggia. Ahead of him, the garden sloped down into the darkness. The railway, he knew, lay somewhere at the foot of it.

When he came back Mr. Bonny was pouring out two generous whiskies.

"Have you got any ideas about this?"

"Ideas," said Mr. Bonny. "Certainly I've got ideas. Do you know that the contents of this house are valued, for insurance purposes, at ten thousand pounds? That's a Morland over the mantelpiece, Inspector."

Petrella looked at the two constipated horses with respect, and said, "What I really meant was, have you any idea who could have tampered with the lock? It looks to me like an inside job."

"Inside?" said Mr. Bonny. "Impossible. There's only old Mrs. Jacket, my housekeeper. She's been with me for years, and is nearly stone deaf."

"Then what would be your idea?"

"It would, I am afraid, be only too simple for someone to come through the garden during the day, when I am out, and Mrs. Jacket is engaged elsewhere—"

"I see," said Petrella. "Preparation by day. Execution by night." It was possible. He could think of no logical objection. It just failed to fit in with his previous experience of how burglars worked. "You can put on a temporary catch for tonight. A

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stout piece of wire across the handles should do it. And have it replaced tomorrow. You'd better give me a ring if anything further happens." Mr. Bonny promised that he would give him a ring. He also gave him a second whisky.

The next call came three nights later, at about seven o'clock when Petrella was going off duty. He again drove himself up to Gosselin Park. Mr. Bonny had seen a suspicious character hanging round the bottom of his garden. It was too dark to make any effective search that night, but Mr. Bonny was in such a state of alarm that Petrella spent twenty minutes in his snuggery, reassuring him and drinking his whisky. He promised that he would pass the word to the man on the local beat to keep his eyes open.

Mr. Bonny was overcome with gratitude, and over their second drink he said, "All this running about after hours; it must be very tiresome for you, Inspector. There ought to be an arrangement by which a householder like myself can pay you overtime."

"There ought to be, indeed," said Petrella heartily. "I've often thought so myself. I'll pass on the suggestion to the Superintendent when I see him next."

He drove back to Gabriel Street, parked the car, had a meal at an eating-house in the High Street, and walked home to his temporary, and not very satisfactory lodgings in Portugal Crescent. His choice, in the evenings, was between sharing the downstairs sitting-room with three old ladies, and getting into his bed and reading. The decision did not take long to make and he was soon settled into bed, the gas-fire alight, his reading lamp on, and in his hand a collection of the Father Brown stories of G. K. Chesterton.

On the following morning he sent for Sergeant Croft, invited him to sit down, and said, "I think the time has come to deal with Mr. Bonny."

To say that Sergeant Croft looked startled would have been exaggerating the matter. His battered face was not one which registered emotion easily. Nevertheless, Petrella received the impression that he was leaving a good deal unsaid when he simply replied, "Yes, sir. What were you thinking of doing?"

"Nothing, right at this moment," said Petrella. "What I want you to do is to let me know as soon as we get another shop-break. If we can hear about it early enough we ought to be able to organise something. *Prompt* information is what's going to count here. Tell everyone that. If any of our men see anything suspicious, they're to let me—or you—know at once. Of

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course, you needn't explain what's behind it. In fact, this had better remain between the two of us for the moment. All right?"

Sergeant Croft again looked as if he was going to say something, then swallowed hard, turned on his heel, and stumped out. Petrella sat staring after him.

It was almost exactly a week later that Police Constable Whittaker, passing the end of Carfax Passage, a cul-de-sac off Station Road, noticed something. A packing-case which had been lying on its side in the gutter when he had passed that way an hour earlier had been moved, and was now standing on one end against the wall. Whittaker flashed his torch upwards and saw the broken glass of a window.

The telephone beside Petrella's bed dragged him out of a dream in which, in full evening dress and a frogman's helmet, he was exploring the Tobermory galleon. He surfaced with difficulty, knocked over the table lamp, managed to locate the receiver, and said, "Yes?"

"Sergeant Croft here, sir. Whittaker's just got through to me. There's been a break in Station Road. Someone got into Procter's by the back way, and opened his safe. Is that the sort of thing we want?"

Petrella collected his thoughts.

"What was in the safe?"

There was a pause while Sergeant Croft consulted.

"Rings and bracelets. And a packet of uncut stones. The old boy says it's all good stuff—and easily identifiable."

"Good," said Petrella. "What's the time now? Five o'clock. I'll meet you at the station at half past six."

"Half past six." Sergeant Croft's voice sounded suddenly sharp. "Are you sure that's right, sir? We don't want to give this little lot a chance of sliding away."

Petrella grinned to himself savagely in the darkness. "This isn't something we can rush," he said. "Half past six, I said, and half past six I meant. And pick us a heavyweight driver."

It was nearly seven o'clock when their car drifted to a halt outside Mr. Bonny's grey-stone front gate.

"Lock the car," said Petrella to the driver. "And come along with us. I'm not expecting a fight, but I want you to watch the back of the house. And we'll stick to the grass. We don't want a lot of noise."

Outside the front door Petrella and Sergeant Croft stood and listened.

"There's a light in the hall," said Croft. They were the first words he had spoken since they had set out.

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" Listen," said Petrella.

" Someone's moving in one of the back rooms, too."

" All right. I'm going to ring the bell, and count ten, slowly. If nothing's happened, we'll break a window and go in. Here goes. One-two-three—"

He had reached eight, when the front door swung open. It was Mr. Bonny.

When he recognised his visitors, he took a quick, shuffling step backwards and, as they crowded through the front door after him, stepped back again, his mouth working, his florid face drained of colour, his eyes swivelling from Petrella to Croft and back again. Then his knees folded under him, and he went down on the hall floor.

" It's his heart," said Petrella. " I never trusted his colour." He was loosening Mr. Bonny's collar and tie. " Get an ambulance. That'll be quicker than trying to carry him down to the car." Sergeant Croft telephoned.

Petrella got a rug from one of the front rooms and put it over Mr. Bonny. His lips were a bit blue, but he was breathing.

Petrella was recalled to his mission by a knocking from the back of the house. He went along the passage, and into Mr. Bonny's study. Here the lights were on, and the curtains tightly drawn. He went over to the french windows, pulled back the curtains, and saw the anxious face of his driver peering through. He slipped the catch.

" You were all so quiet I reckoned he must have done you," said the driver.

" He's done himself," said Petrella.

On the study table were three cardboard boxes. Two were already packaged up in neat brown paper. The third was still unwrapped. Petrella lifted the lid. Inside was a blue case with, *Procter. Jeweller and Silversmith*, in small gold letters on the lid.

Behind him he heard Sergeant Croft breathing down his neck.

" Here it is," he said. " So fresh it's almost warm to the touch. Another thirty minutes, and it would have been away."

He pointed to the two packets which had been sealed. They had been addressed in bold, black capitals; one to *A. Smith, Poste Restante, Lossiemouth*, the other to *B. Smith, Poste Restante, Bangor*.

Outside they heard the ambulance bell coming up the drive.

" They'll pull him round all right," said Superintendent Benjamin. It was late that afternoon, and they were sitting in the Superintendent's office.

" He's a dying man, and I suppose I ought to be sorry for him,"

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said Petrella, " but I'm not. He's done too much mischief."

" He won't be causing anyone much more trouble now," said Benjamin. " Just tell me how you worked it out."

" Most of the credit must go to a Mr. Cornstalk," said Petrella. " If he hadn't got up so early, we might never have seen it. The rest goes to G. K. Chesterton."

Benjamin said cautiously, " How do you mean? "

Superintendent Haxtell had warned him that Petrella was odd, that he read poetry, and had even been known to quote it.

" He pointed out that the postman on his rounds is truly invisible, because everyone expects him to be there. Mr. Bonny's system was based on that.

"He'd let it be known that if anyone stole anything, like jewellery or watches or lighters—anything small and valuable and fairly portable—he'd give tip-top prices for it. With one strict proviso. You had to bring it to his house between half past six and half past seven in the morning, or half past four and half past five in the afternoon. That's what kept Carson kicking his heels for nearly two hours."

" Yes, I see," said Benjamin. " And as soon as he got anything, he parcelled it up and posted it off to—who? Were A. Smith of Lossiemouth and B. Smith of Bangor and C. Smith of goodness-knows-where just Bonny himself? "

" There's a lot of work still to do on that angle, sir," said Petrella. " But my guess is they're real people. What I imagine happened was that if they could dispose of the stuff, they paid Bonny in kind—surplus goods, and bankrupt stock, and so on. At a cracking discount, of course. Which Bonny then sold at a handsome profit in his shop."

" And if they couldn't? "

" After a month, they'd collect and post the parcel back to him. Or to another Poste Restante, if Bonny hadn't found a buyer for it."

" Magnificent," said Benjamin. " And he did it all without setting foot outside the house. I suppose the postman picked up the parcels in the hall. They often will if you treat them right. Morning *and* evening, by the way? "

" I think so. That's why he wouldn't have me in the house before seven. When he sent for me about his burglary—he'd made all that up, of course—I jumped to the conclusion that he was trying the same tricks with me as he did with Carver."

The Superintendent looked up, but said nothing.

" He did put out a feeler about bribery. But I thought it was more that he wanted people to notice me visiting him in his private house, and start jumping to conclusions."

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The very faintest smile wrinkled the Superintendent's forehead. "He underestimated you," he said.

When Petrella had departed he sat on for a few minutes, deep in thought. It was an excellent day's work. No doubt about it. There were loose ends to be tied up. But further investigation—a copy of Mr. Bonny's telephone account, for instance—might lead to startling results in far corners of the country, or even on the continent. He unlocked a drawer in his desk and pulled out a sheet of official paper, on which a report had been laboriously typed.

It started, *Sir, I feel it my painful duty to report to you*—and went on to say that Detective Inspector Petrella had lately become friendly with Mr. Bonny—*suspected of being a receiver of stolen goods*—and had twice been observed to visit his house after dark, without thereafter making any official report on the subject of his visit.

It was signed, *A. Croft, Detective Sergeant.*

The Superintendent tore it slowly into small pieces and deposited the pieces in the waste-paper basket. Better days, he felt, might be at hand now for Gabriel Street Police Station.

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"Well, actually, I find him quite useful."

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Inviting a tiger for a weekend.
The gesture is not heroics but discipline,
The memoirs will be splendid . . .

JOSÉ GARCIA VILLA, *Have Come, Am Here*

In the still jungle of the senses lay
A tiger soundly sleeping, till one day
A bold young hunter chanced to come that way.

" How calm," he said, " that splendid creature lies,
I long to rouse him into swift surprise! "
A well aimed arrow, shot from amorous eyes.

He crouches for a spring! his eyes dilate—
Alas! bold hunter, what shall be thy fate,
Thou canst not fly, it is too late, too late.

ELLA WHEELER WILCOX, *The Tiger*

Not to be Sniffed At

Shortly after their arrival Brown went out for a sun-down stroll by himself . . . Rounding the next bend, some ten yards ahead, swinging along, was a huge tigress. With the wit that flies to our brain in tight places, he squeezed himself as flat as possible against the hill-side and kept as doggo as his agitation would let him, holding his breath. With awful slowness the beast swung along towards him, apparently enjoying the evening air just as he had been doing. She drew alongside, yes, she was actually passing him. But the tension and the sudden relief were too much, and his nerve gave way. Giving her haunch a mighty smack he exclaimed, " Gee up, old lady! "

Next thing he knew he was hanging over the precipice supported

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by the tigress, who had her teeth in his clothes. She was pulling him up on to the path. He knew that his only hope now was to sham dead, and he lay on the path as limp as possible while she began to sniff him all over. Now he always carried snuff in his pocket, and some of it had been shaken out over his waistcoat in his fall. Presently the tigress gave an almighty sneeze, and bounded off in haste . . .

A week or two later the two friends were walking together when Brown pointed to the very turn of the path where it happened. " And look, here's a fair find," said Robinson, aiming his gun at a tigress stretched out on a rock . . . " Stop! " cried Brown, pulling his arm down, " don't shoot her. That's my tigress. She saved my life."

M. VIVIAN HUGHES, *A London Girl of the Eighties*

Not to be Trifled With

Madam, where do you wish to put the tiger?
Do you want him in the drawing-room or the hall?
We have him in the van, a splendid fellow,
Would you like him on the floor, or on the wall?

Madam, why did your husband shoot the tiger?
Did he hear a roar, and then a kind of snort
And shoot in self-defence? Excuse me asking,
But I'm interested in every kind of sport.

I'd say we men are pretty savage creatures,
Only women keep us civilised at all.
Madam! What did you say? You shot the tiger
And you wish him placed at once upon the wall.

LOUISA ELLIOTT BAXTER

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Excellent Digestion

There was a young lady of Niger
Who smiled as she rode on a tiger.
They returned from the ride
With the lady inside
And the smile on the face of the tiger.

ANON

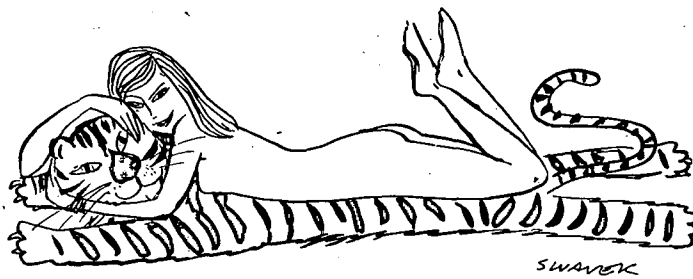
Rugged Attraction

The following day, while Elinor (Glyn) was still in a romantic daze over the love of Andreas and Theodora, a good-looking young Frenchman, who had visited the Kennedy's in Jersey a month earlier, came to call at Mademoiselle Duret's flat, bringing an invitation that they should visit his own family. He contrived to spend the next three days in Elinor's company and, although they were naturally never left alone together, he managed to make passionate love to her in English, which Mademoiselle Duret understood imperfectly. The three of them visited the Paris Zoo and it was there that Elinor saw her first tiger-skin. As she stared fascinated through the bars of the cage, the young Frenchman kept whispering " Belle Tigresse! " into her ear . . .

A more substantial form of fan-mail arrived over the years in the form of tiger-skins, presented by various admirers, known and unknown, including one each from Lord Curzon and Lord Milner. It was at this time, too, that the rhyme, which caused Elinor much amusement, first appeared . . .

" Would you like to sin
with Elinor Glyn
on a tiger-skin? *Or would you prefer*
to err
with her
on some other fur? "

ANTHONY GLYN,
Elinor Glyn



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IN COLD BLOOD

Fear ripped down my back
like an icy knife

BY DUFF HART-DAVIS

I SAW at once that it couldn't last long. Parr was far too strong for the Bosun, and both of them knew it. I felt sorry for the Bosun; he looked too old to be fighting, there was dark blood shining on his chin, and he'd already had about as much as he could stand.

Parr came lumbering at him, arrogantly careless of his guard. He looked like a black mountain in that narrow space, with the moonlight coming straight down the companionway behind him. He was cruel, I knew—hard as the bare, Welsh hills he was born in—and he had no mercy. He hit the Bosun twice. Two crunching, smashing blows in the face, and the old body rattled up against the bulwarks like a bag of bones.

It was the first real fight I'd ever seen, and it made me pretty sick, but the next moment I was deadly afraid. I thought Parr had finished, but I was wrong. The big sailor dragged the body up and hit it again; then he gathered it up as easily as a bundle of rags and tossed it over the side. There was a quick flurry of arms and legs against the sky, and the Bosun was gone.

Fear ripped down my back like an icy knife. I tried to yell, "Man overboard!" but the shout stuck in my throat and all that came out was a croak.

Parr heard it, whipped round, saw me, and seized me by the shoulders. He spun me and shoved me hard up against the gunwale, so that I was forced out over the sea. Now the moon was full on his hideous face, and I saw that his slow eyes were ablaze with triumph.

"What were yer doin' there, boy?" he snarled. "Eh? Yer didn't see nothin', did yer? Yer never saw nothin'." His hands were like steel claws at my throat; his face, gleaming-eyed, almost black in the darkness, only a few inches from mine. The rank, animal smell of him was all round me, stifling and smothering. We'd been cleaning the paintbrushes that day, and the stench of his body was mixed with the reek of turpentine.

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You know how evocative smells can be—whenever I smell turpentine now I'm carried straight back to that night. I can feel those hands at my throat and the hard edge of the rail cutting into my back. God, I was frightened! The whole night seemed to be full of Parr's presence.

I fought to free myself, but it was like struggling against ten men. I could hardly move—his bulk was squashing me against the rail.

"Yes . . . yes . . ." I faltered. "I—"

"No, yer didn't!" His voice was a growl, a rasping snarl, and a blast of filthy breath.

The muscles in his shoulders rose in glistening, blue-black knots as he lifted me bodily by the neck and held me over the side. My scream died where it had begun, throttled under his tightening fingers. The stars began to spin before my eyes, and the voice seemed to come from far away.

"Yer don't know nothin' about it. Yer never saw it happen. *Did* yer? If anyone finds out, you'll go, too. Understand?" and he thrust me still farther out over the rushing water.

I nodded my head feebly. His face swam slowly back into focus as he relaxed the pressure and set me down on the deck.

"Now get back to yer bunk and stay there!" He gave me a shove that sent me sprawling through the doorway into the accommodation.

Hugging the walls, I dragged myself along to my cabin, where I flopped down on my bunk and burst into tears.

I lay there face-down in the suffocating darkness, trembling all over. For a while I could not even think, so violently had I been shaken up: my brain had been knocked dizzy by the sudden viciousness of what I had seen, and it would not work at all. Terror and pity and doubt raged seething through my mind. But through the whirling chaos of my emotions there pounded one clear thought—I must at all costs raise the alarm. Raise the alarm, make the officer on duty turn the ship round, and go back to pick up the Bosun.

I clung to the idea desperately. Everything inside me and everything I'd ever learnt told me that was what I must do. Otherwise—otherwise I would be a murderer.

But at the same time I saw just as clearly that I couldn't do it. I was only seventeen, remember. I was terrified of Parr. His last threat kept booming through my head: *You'll go, too. Understand? You'll go, too.* And I knew he meant it. If he caught me trying to get up to the bridge, he wouldn't scruple to throw me overboard as well. As I lay recovering from the

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shock, a dreadful certainty began to grow inside me, swelling and spreading like some contaminating fungus. I became more and more sure I would never dare to leave the cabin.

Still I couldn't open my eyes. If I kept them closed, I seemed to be able to shut out some of the frightful reality of my situation. The storm inside me had resolved itself into a straightforward fight between my conscience on one side, and Parr—or fear, or whatever I called it—on the other.

Fear against duty; Parr against conscience. It was suddenly all too clear.

I believe that was the first time in my life I had ever really been forced to think. I thought furiously, bringing up as allies all the arguments I could find on either side.

I told myself that I had had nothing to do with the fight, and therefore wasn't responsible for its consequences, but the argument was so obviously invalid that there was no comfort in it. I reasoned that if I hadn't happened to stumble on the fight the Bosun would have been drowned anyway. That wasn't much use either, but at least it brought on a pang of self-pity, in which I found momentary refuge.

Bitterly I cursed my luck for having brought the whole business on me. Why should it have happened to *me*? And on my first voyage? Why should it have been the Bosun who lost the fight? I'd only been at sea a fortnight, but of all the crew he seemed to me the one who least deserved such a fate.

The longer I lay there, the worse it grew. Even if I did raise the alarm now, I would get into trouble for not having done it sooner.

Dimly I heard Eight Bells sound, and the footsteps of the watch going aft. That meant the Mate would have come on duty. I was afraid of him—it would have been much easier if I'd gone while the Third Mate was still on the bridge.

One by one the arguments for staying where I was came flooding into my mind, and one by one they vanished into nothing as they burst upon the rock of my conscience.

At last I opened my eyes and turned over. A shaft of moonlight lay across my chest, and I raised myself on one elbow to look out of the porthole. A slight breeze was making the sea choppy, and millions of little dancing waves were glittering coldly in the light of the setting moon. A broad path of them seemed to lead right up to the moon itself; the rest of the sea was black as soot.

I can't tell you what that sight did to me. Its utter loneliness pierced like a knife into my heart. I jumped to my feet with a little cry. In a flash I knew what it would be like to be where the

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Bosun was: to see the lights of the ship slowly going down, fainter and fainter, over the horizon, and to be left alone in the middle of that inky wilderness with nothing but the dying moon for company. You'd go mad before you drowned! I couldn't bear it.

Panic brought a sudden rush of courage.

I opened the door and crept down the corridor to the lavatory, my mind racing ahead, forming a plan. I guessed that Parr would be watching to see that I didn't leave the accommodation block but, if I could wriggle through the lavatory porthole, I might be able to slip round the other side of the deckhouse and avoid him.

As long as I could reach the bridge before he caught me, it would be all right—he'd be locked up afterwards.

Without switching on the light, I opened the lavatory door, closed it again behind me, and peered cautiously out. My courage evaporated in an instant: Parr was lounging against the rail opposite the 'midships hatch. A little fountain of white shavings was springing up from the piece of wood he was whittling; the chips were floating in front of him for a second or two, and then fluttering unsteadily away into the darkness. From where he was he could see right across the ship: there was no chance of passing him.

I watched hopelessly for a few minutes and then slunk back to my cabin and lay down again.

In spite of the heat I started to shiver violently, but I couldn't make myself get up to put on a jersey. I was all but paralysed with fear.

I told myself that even if I did raise the alarm, it would now be far too late. I reckoned that at least a quarter of an hour had elapsed since the Bosun went over the side. The ship took nineteen minutes to go fully about, steaming in the tightest possible circle. Then it would take another fifteen to steam back—fifty minutes was the absolute minimum in which we could reach him. That was supposing we found him straight away. But what if he'd swum? And which way would he swim? The coast of Africa was eighty miles off . . .

There was a sudden scuffle outside. Taffy, my cabin mate, put his tousled head round the door. "The Old Man wants the Bosun on the bridge. Haven't seen him, have you?"

Had I seen him! Everything inside me was convulsed into one agonising spasm. My heart and lungs and stomach all seemed to leap into my mouth; my throat muscles snapped tight, and I couldn't breathe or make any sound except for one strangled hiccup.

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"What's up with you?" Taffy frowned. "You look like a blinking ghost."

"I—er—something I've eaten," I managed to mutter.

"Oh, tough luck," he said sympathetically. "You haven't seen the Bosun, then?"

Again the same awful constriction seized me by the throat and I almost vomited. My whole being leapt up and shouted, "Yes, yes, yes!" but I couldn't get the word out. I shook my head.

"Thanks," said Taffy, and went whistling off down the passage.

As soon as he'd gone a flood of bitter rage and shame swept down upon me; I was sickened by my own cowardice—and by my stupidity—for Taffy would have been the ideal confidant. I knew him well enough to have shared my problem with him; he could have raised the alarm himself. And yet I had shaken my head.

Once again my thoughts were in a seething turmoil, but the moonlight drew them irresistibly back out to sea, to the man we had left behind. I wondered how well he could swim, how long he could stay afloat. He wouldn't die of exposure for hours in a sea as warm as that. He'd live as long as he had the strength to keep swimming.

Then I remembered the sharks. The cabin grew even colder as I thought of them.

Only that afternoon I had watched them gliding purposefully beside the ship, patiently waiting for something to be thrown over the side, their sharp dorsal fins carving creamy furrows along the surface, and their wicked snouts turning from side to side. The water was full of them. He wouldn't drown at all—he'd be torn to pieces.

I looked at my watch in terror. Now I was convinced that it really was too late. Surely he couldn't survive for a whole hour, a piece of live bait lit up as brightly as a neon sign by the sparkling phosphorescence of the tropical sea? The mere thought of it filled me with such horror that I suddenly nerved myself to face Parr. I couldn't stay where I was any longer.

Too late or not, I had to go to the bridge.

I slid out of the cabin and crept silently along to the outside door. Parr had left his place beside the hatch. I bolted headlong up the sloping deck towards the bridge. My feet shot from under me in a patch of oil, but I was up again in a second and scuttling on.

I hurtled on to the bridge, panting and gasping, and flung myself at the Mate.

"Help!" I shouted. "Quick!"

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The small, wizened face showed signs of irritation. "What's the matter, boy?"

"The Bosun. He's overboard!"

"Look, son, take it steady. Calm down a bit."

His condescension maddened me. Surely it was obvious what I meant?

"The *Bosun*!" I yelled, my voice rising to a desperate scream. "He's overboard. In the sea!"

"No, he ain't," said the Mate flatly. "He's here."

I gaped at him. I mouthed speechlessly. "Where?" I gasped. "He can't be."

"He ruddy well is—talking to the Old Man in the chartroom."

I couldn't believe him. It was impossible.

A moment later the Bosun walked out through the chartroom door.

When I came to I was lying flat on my back on the deck. I'd passed clean out. I woke to find a ring of anxious faces peering down at me, among them the Bosun's. It was like seeing a ghost, only the ghost was alive, and I shut my eyes again quickly.

The Captain fetched a tot of whisky, and he and the Mate lifted me to my feet. As soon as I'd recovered they began asking questions.

My story of the fight came pouring out uncontrollably, my voice faltering and breaking whenever I looked at the Bosun. He was just the same as when I'd seen him last, wearing a dirty, white singlet.

I thought his left cheek looked a bit puffy, but it was turned away from the light, and I couldn't be sure.

It was a damned odd sensation to be standing next to the man, when I was certain he was dead. I just couldn't accept him: I couldn't believe he was real.

I sensed that the officers were becoming more and more incredulous. I saw they didn't believe me. How could they? The Bosun was standing there beside them.

In the end, in desperation, I appealed to him.

"*You* know it's true, anyway," I cried to him. "Go on, tell them it's true!"

He shrugged his shoulders, looking from the Mate to the Captain and then back to me. "I don't know what the youngster's on about," he said slowly. "Seems to be ill or something."

I stared at him appalled. He must have gone mad!

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I looked him straight in the face, but his eyes were completely blank. If anything, they held a hint of pity. I groped for words, unavailingly. It was no use saying anything else. I turned and stumbled blindly away, only half hearing the Captain tell me I'd better go and lie down. My whole world had tumbled about me. There seemed to be nothing left in which I could believe. The Bosun was the one man I'd instinctively felt I could trust, and now he was lying.

Either that, or else it was my eyes that I couldn't trust. But I knew they hadn't deceived me. I had red weals on my neck to prove that the whole thing hadn't been a dream. Worst of all, I'd done what I knew was right, and I'd succeeded only in making a fool of myself . . .

Later that evening the Bosun came along to my cabin. I hardly dared ask him to come in. I cringed away from him as he sat down, keeping myself as far from him as possible. Absurd, I know, but somehow I couldn't help it.

" You saw the scrap, then? " he began.

I nodded assent, staring at him fixedly. I could see now that the whole of the left side of his face was discoloured and swollen, but I could still scarcely believe that he was alive.

" Sorry to do that on the bridge just now," he went on. " It was rough on you, but I couldn't let on to the Old Man."

He shifted his position.

" Parr and me's running a bit of a line, you see. Gold, it is, in Freetown. We had an argument about the shares we'll have next time. If I was out the way, he'd get the lot, see? That's all straight now, though."

" But you went over the side," I faltered. " I—I thought you'd gone."

" Ah! " He gave a short laugh. " Bit of luck. Hitting the water woke me up, and as I went aft I was swept straight into the log-line. I tied it round me middle. When Freddie came aft at Eight Bells he saw me and pulled me in."

The log-line! I'd never thought of it. The log is a ship's speedometer—it's a dial recording speed and mileage, fixed to the rail, with a spinner trailing behind the ship at the end of fifty yards of stout cable.

Now everything was real again. I *had* seen the fight. The Bosun *had* gone overboard.

But I didn't feel any better. My aching fears had given place to a gnawing, empty dissatisfaction, a hopeless feeling that all my efforts had been for nothing.

How could I ever explain to the Bosun what I'd been through? How could I make him understand what it had cost me to drag

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myself up to the bridge? Slowly, haltingly, I tried to tell him.

He listened patiently, not interrupting, and as I went stumbling on I began to feel a great wave of relief flooding through me. I could see that he did understand. He had no words with which to tell me of his sympathy; he wasn't eloquent—few sailors are. Yet I knew from his eyes and from the way he listened that he was understanding. However tough and callous his life had made him, somewhere inside him a spark of feeling still glowed, and for a moment that spark came to life.

When I had finished, he got up and said, "You'll find that happens all along, son. You know you ought to do something, you have the hell of a job making yourself do it, and then when you've done it, you get nothing for it. Like now. But all the same, you still know that it was right to do it, and you feel better than you would if you'd left it alone."

He went out, leaving me amazed at his calm acceptance of it all. For him the whole incident was over. I was only just beginning to learn about the sea.

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TIME OF DAY

If you are given to day-dreaming, here's an excursion into some notable days to wake you and shake you. If the excursion proves a day-trip, turn to page 94.

1. *What were the "ten days that shook the world?"*
2. *Days of grace sound like days of yore, but what are they really?*
3. *Everyone's day seems the same, but an astronomer's is different. In what way?*
4. *With which film stars do you associate:*
   a. A Day at the Races;
   b. A Bad Day at Black Rock?
5. *Fill in the blanks:*
   a. Go not — day;
   b. My salad days, when I was — in judgment;
   c. Night and day, you are the —
6. *Daylight saving is something we all take for granted, but when did it begin?*
7. *Which authors do you connect with:*
   a. Frabjous day;
   b. Policeman Day;
   c. Crispin Crispian's Day?

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WOOLA, WOOLA

There was a tall black fellow standing inside the ring of firelight

BY DOUGLAS LEACH

IT was that time in Queensland when Joe Quigley, the one-time jockey, and I were on the tramp through the sheep country round Barcaldine, in the good old days when being a swaggie—that's a hobo—was a recognised profession, and when, if you timed it right, you could always make sure of a good feed and a flop by turning up at the homestead of a sheep station just at sundown.

We first met Woola Woola one night when we were camped in the bed of a dry creek. It all comes back to me like it only happened last Tuesday—the fire of gum logs, and the scent of smoke and burning eucalyptus leaves; the only sounds, the night wind in the gum-trees and the clicking of Joe's new set of teeth as he dug into his panful of mutton hash. I remember I heard something move, and I looked up, and there was a tall black fellow standing just inside the ring of the firelight.

It startled us for a moment, because he'd appeared so quietly. Then Joe said, "Who are you? What do you want?"

The black fellow came closer, staring as though the sight of us eating fascinated him. He didn't say anything, but made a rumbling noise in his throat that sounded like, "Woola, woola, woola." He was a tough-looking baby, coal black, well over six foot, and with long, corded muscles that rippled smooth as silk when he moved. He was naked except for a loin-cloth, and his face had the battered, beat-up look you find on most aborigines. But the strangest thing about this guy was the bowler hat rammed on the back of his head. It didn't fit in with the rest of his appearance, and struck a sort of jarring note.

When he rubbed his stomach and made that woola, woola sound again I threw him a bit of meat. He caught it in his great black paw and wolfed it down without chewing it.

"The poor cove is starving," said Joe.

So we gave him the rest of the hash, and he dug right in. There was plenty of it, because we'd been travelling through sheep country, but it disappeared in a matter of seconds.

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"Plenty good, my word!" the black fellow said. "You plenty good fella!"

"Well, he speaks English, anyway," said Joe. "Hey, you fella, where you from?"

"Me—longtime walkabout," the black fellow said, and he pointed with his chin off towards the north-east.

"One of them Cape York boys, I reckon," remarked Joe. "He ain't no ordinary Myall; he's too big. He probably fell into the hands of the missionaries at some time or other, and that's where he picked up his little bit of pidgin."

After a while the black fellow scrooched around on the ground like my dog used to do making up its mind where to sleep, and inside of a minute he was snoring his head off.

From that moment the black savage attached himself to us. Ever been followed by a stray pooch, and chased him away, and had him turn up again hours later when you thought you'd got rid of him? It was like that with this guy, and in the end we didn't even try to chase him off. He would trail along about fifty yards behind us, always keeping that distance till we built a fire and cooked a meal. Then he'd come right up close and make that woola, woola sound till we fed him. That's why we called him Woola Woola.

He was handy, mind; strong as an ox, and could pick up a log for the fire that me and Joe couldn't have lifted between us, and carry it as if it was only a stick. And he never got lost, and always knew where the nearest creek or waterhole was.

In the next few weeks we wandered right down across the Barcoo and over the ranges towards the Buckland Tableland. That was where the going really got rugged. The sheep stations were few and far between, and owing to drought all the sheep were being fed round the home yards, so there was no chance of knocking off a stray.

One noon we arrived at the homestead of the big Patterson Station, and as soon as Joe saw the fine big buildings and the sheep blatting in the paddock, he let out a sigh of relief.

"This'll do us, Yank!" he muttered, a gleam in his eye.

We could see the boss sitting on the verandah, and when the station dogs came rushing at us, barking, he called 'em off, which was always a good sign.

"You put the fangs into 'im, Yank!" Joe whispered.

I cleared my throat and was just going to launch into my usual hard-luck story when a police trooper stepped out on to the verandah, very stylish in his polished leggings and his big hat turned up on one side.

"Holy smoke!" groaned Joe. "A john!"

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Now I don't mind admitting that the unexpected appearance of this cop gave me a very stiff jolt. But it was nothing to what it did to Woola Woola!

That black baby took one pop-eyed look, let out a yell, turned like a flash, and vanished. Brother, I never saw any human run like it in all my life! One moment he was there, and the next he was gone. *Zzzzt-zzt!* Just like that.

"What are you blokes doin' with that abo?" demanded the trooper, staring off to where Woola Woola had disappeared.

"We ain't doin' nothin' with him," said Joe. "He's just follerin' us about."

"A couple of dead beats if ever I've seen any," said the cop, looking us over with a mean, cold eye. "On the wallaby, eh?"

"On the wallaby" is the Aussie term for being on the tramp, and those up-country cops had a nasty habit of shoving you in the cooler on a vagrancy charge if they thought you were broke.

"We're not on the wallaby, bud; we are looking for work," I told him, with just the right amount of indignation.

"Well, now, if that isn't a coincidence!" said the station boss, getting to his feet. "I'm looking for some real, honest-to-dinkum toilers like you two. Got some fence posts I want split."

He had us, and he knew it. Yeah, he knew we couldn't refuse, not with that trooper watching. So he took us out to where there was a dirty great pile of hardwood and stringy-bark logs, cut into lengths; and the trooper trailed along just to make sure we didn't back out. The boss got us an axe apiece, a heavy maul, and some wedges.

"Wire in!" he told us, with a friendly grin. "They're all yours."

Brother, until you've split twisted hardwood logs under a Queensland sun you don't know what real work is! Me and Joe had done all kinds of jobs in our time, but we'd never sunk as low as that before.

After a while the trooper went back into the house and came out with a couple of bottles of beer. Then he sat in the shade and drank them, and made sarcastic remarks whenever we straightened up to take the kinks out of our backs.

By sundown we were on the brink of collapse. I had blisters as big as grapes on my hands, and I knew that my fingers were ruined, so that I'd never be able to deal myself a good poker hand again. As for Joe, he was speechless; and when Joe Quigley can't talk he's practically dead.

When it got too dark to see, the trooper escorted us back to the house, and the station boss said he'd pay us next day, when we had finished the pile. Then we had grub in the men's quarters,

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and me and Joe really packed it away. No camels setting out to cross a desert ever stoked up like we did, for of course we didn't mean to stay till the next day. It had been a soul-searing experience, and wouldn't have happened if it hadn't been for that police trooper. It was a thousand to one chance against his happening to visit the station on the very day we dropped in. That's the sort of raw deal fate has handed me all my life.

They gave us a couple of bunks in the roustabouts' shed that night, but we hardly used 'em. We slept for maybe two hours, then we got up, rolled our swags, and stole out of there. We didn't know where we were going, and we didn't care as long as we didn't have any more fence posts to split.

On the way out we passed through a small irrigated orchard behind the vegetable garden, and we filled a gunny sack with oranges. When we were a safe distance from the homestead we flopped under a tree for the night.

In the morning there was Woola Woola, squatting on his heels and grinning that friendly grin of his. How he'd found us we never knew, but he was like that. He would always turn up, and his doglike devotion was a very beautiful thing.

" Plenty good fella," he rumbled. " Plenty good fella master! Woola, woola, woola, woola."

We gave him half a dozen oranges, and he ate them, skin, pips, and all; but we could see he was very disappointed there wasn't any meat.

Joe was staring at him thoughtfully, and after a while he said, " Yer know, I reckon he must be about the fastest thing on two legs, dinkum. Did yer see him travel when he saw the trooper? I've ridden racehorses that couldn't go as fast as that."

Now, as I said before, Joe was an ex-jockey, and when you get a guy that's been warned off every course in Australia, you've got someone who knows something about pace. So naturally I began to look at Woola Woola with a bit more interest, and gradually I got the glimmerings of an idea. If he was as fast as Joe reckoned, there was money in him.

But there was something about Woola Woola that puzzled me, and I said to him, " Why you fright alonga policeman? "

Woola Woola hugged his ribs and nodded that kinky head of his. " Me plenty fright, my word," he muttered. " Me—" and he tapped his chest—" me, cannibal! "

Joe grunted as if someone had hit him, and I must say I felt a bit queer myself. Joe looked at me, and I looked at him, and we both looked at Woola Woola.

Now and then you'd read about cases of cannibalism. When

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such crimes occurred the Queensland police would hunt down the offender and have him tried and strung up just to take the appetite away from the others; so we could see why the sight of that uniform had scared the hell out of Woola Woola.

"Better give him some more of them oranges," said Joe, shivering a little.

I looked at Joe. He was a wizened-up little guy with bow legs and a head that was too big for his body. "It's all right, Joe," I said. "You're too thin to tempt him. Besides, they say they don't like white meat much."

"No?" muttered Joe. "Then where did he get that bowler hat?"

It certainly was a queer feeling, hobnobbing with a cannibal, but I soon got used to it; and so, eventually, did Joe, though it took him a bit longer.

"You got that stop-watch?" I asked Joe, when we stopped for a rest at noon in an empty boundary-rider's hut.

"Too right!" said Joe, lugging it out and gazing at it fondly.

You see, after he'd lost his jockey's licence Joe had managed to keep body and soul together for a time by touting and spying round racing stables, and selling the information to the big betting men. Many a nice hunk of dough that watch had earned him, and he'd grown quite attached to it.

"How about clocking Woola Woola?" I said. "We ought to find out how good he really is."

It was quite simple. We paced out a hundred yards on the flat, and I took Woola Woola to the start while Joe stood on the finishing line.

It took us some time to get the idea into Woola Woola's thick skull, but after a while he cottoned on. When I dropped my hat as a starting signal he shot off like a bullet, and flashed past Joe almost before the hat had hit the ground.

"Well?" I called out.

"Six seconds dead," said Joe.

"Nuts!" I said. "Why, the world record is only nine-three."

"I don't care what the flamin' record is, he did it in six seconds," said Joe.

And then, when I still wouldn't believe it, he went on, "Look, you want to forget all about official times and world records. This bloke is supernatural!"

Just to make sure, we tried Woola Woola out again, and this time Joe swore he'd done it in five-five.

"Joe," I said, as we ate our evening meal, "we've got something here that could make us a fortune if we handle it right."

"What have you got in mind?" said Joe.

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"We'll take him into Brisbane and match him against one of Chubby Sheldon's runners," I explained. "You know what Chubby is: a compulsive gambler if ever there was one. He just has to bet. The last I heard he'd got hold of some guy from Sydney that he reckons is the fastest thing since Jesse Owens. And if we offer his man a fine, fat start—and we can afford to make it as much as fifteen yards—we can ask long odds."

Chubby Sheldon was a rich Brisbane man who kept a stable of assorted athletes as a hobby. Boxers, runners, wrestlers—the lot. A thousand pounds was chicken-feed to him, so we could make it a big wager. And we'd be betting on a certainty.

But right away Joe pointed out the snag. "Chubby may be a millionaire, but he don't make big bets with blokes that ain't got the cash. If we want to bet a thousand quid, we'll have to show him a thousand quid."

That, of course, was the trouble. We had no working capital. The nice hunk of dough that Joe made when he rode the red-hot favourite, Jackeroo, in the Randwick Plate, and came in last but one, had gone long ago; and all I had was about twenty-five shillings. What we needed was a wealthy backer.

"What about that rich brother of yours?" I suggested. "The one that's got the butcher's shop in South Brisbane? Wouldn't he be good for a thousand if you showed him how attractive the prospects were?"

"You mean Charlie?" said Joe. "Hell, I ain't never got anything out of Charlie except the offer of lots of hard work. He's always short of help, and whenever I go to see him he shoves a meat cleaver in my hand, or wants me to shift a few sides of beef. Not for little Joe!" He shook his head sadly, and added, "Besides, he's a pious cove, and don't hold with such sinful pastimes as betting."

"Then there's only one way out," I said. "We shall have to cut Abie Mossman in on the deal."

"That crook!" Joe snorted.

"Well, I know Abie isn't a very desirable character," I said, "but he's got money. We could let him have a part of Woola Woola for putting up the dough."

We talked it over for a long time, and Joe agreed that it was the best plan in the circumstances.

"This is the greatest thing that's ever happened to us, Joe," I said. "I guess my luck must have changed at last."

And it sure looked as though I was right, for it was soon after that we came across the old ewe. Owing to the drought she was as thin as a rail and almost at her last gasp, so Joe, who was very softhearted, put her out of her misery, and that night

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we roasted her whole over a slow fire. Woola Woola stood around, slavering at the mouth, and once or twice we had to shove him away from the fire with a stick.

As it turned out she was the toughest bit of mutton I ever socked my teeth into, but Woola Woola, who finished up all we couldn't eat, found her delicious.

Next day the blow fell. We'd been giving Woola Woola a daily workout over the hundred yards, but this time he turned in a most disappointing performance.

"Ten-five!" snorted Joe in disgust when Woola Woola finished up blowing like a broken-winded dray-horse. "Why, he's lost all his pep. Let's try him again."

So we tried him again, but the second time he was worse, and didn't break eleven seconds.

"It must be that meat he ate!" Joe snarled.

So, over the next two weeks, we experimented, and found that to get the best out of him he had to be kept away from meat, which slowed him down in a most extraordinary manner.

"All right, then; we'll make a ruddy vegetarian out of him!" said Joe.

And that is just what we did.

By this time we were travelling south down the Queensland coast, where the fruit and dairy farms are, so we kept Woola Woola on a strict diet of milk, fruit, an occasional piece of bread and butter, and green truck. He didn't like it a bit, and he'd get a wild look in his eye sometimes.

Come to that, it was pretty rugged for us, too, because we had to go on the same diet ourselves. After all, we couldn't sit there scoffing chops and steaks, while Woola Woola munched a bit of lettuce or a banana sandwich. And how can you explain protein excess and vitamins and metabolism to a poor heathen that doesn't speak more than a dozen words of pidgin English?

We didn't suffer in vain, though. By the time we reached the outskirts of Brisbane, Woola Woola was as hard as nails, and so fast that we didn't bother to clock him any more.

"The first thing we'll have to do is get him some clothes," I told Joe as we made camp on the slope of a tree-covered hill overlooking the suburbs. "We can't introduce him to all the amenities of civilisation without at least getting pants on him."

So I went into town and got a cheap pair of trousers for fifteen shillings and a cotton shirt for five, and we dressed Woola Woola up in them and took him to the house in Toowong where Abie Mossman lived.

We had quite a time getting Woola Woola to Toowong. He'd

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never been in a city before, and he was awful scary and wild. I remember once, when a Coorparoo tram came clanging round the corner he howled with fright and flung himself face downwards on the pavement. We coaxed him to his feet before much of a crowd gathered, but when he got to Abie's place he was still sweating.

Abie was very surprised to see us with a black fellow. He stood there on the front porch, peering at us through his watery eyes. He wore a dirty shirt and no tie and he needed a shave. Yeah, he dressed as if he hadn't a cent in the world, though he owned streets of houses in Toowong.

"What do you want?" he said gloomily, with that suspicious look you see in a guy's eyes when he thinks you've come to put the bite on him.

"Take us somewhere private where we can talk," I said.

He shuffled off to a fly-spotted little back room he used as an office, and there we put our proposition before him. At first he wasn't very impressed, and he began to look gloomier than ever. He was the most melancholy guy I ever saw, and always seemed to be on the point of bursting into tears—although believe me, he was never the one that needed to do any weeping. He did all right.

"How do I know he's as fast as you say he is?" he muttered, poking Woola Woola all over with his bony forefinger, and feeling his muscles.

"We'll show you," I told him.

So we all went down to the lonely river flats at the back of the cemetery and, after scouting around to make sure there weren't any onlookers, we let Woola Woola do his stuff. Even Abie, who wasn't any athlete, could see he was practically supersonic.

But Abie was still doubtful.

"I don't like deals with these fellows in 'em," he said. "There's laws about these aborigines."

"There's the one about not giving 'em any liquor," put in Joe. "And we don't need to break that."

"If I put up the money, what's my cut?" Abie wanted to know.

"A third," I said. "Share and share alike."

"Nothin' doin'!" grunted Abie. "Suppose I put up a thousand, and something happens? You can't tell. He might fall sick, or twist his ankle. I lose a thousand quid; you don't lose nothin'. Call that a fair deal? I want a half!"

Naturally me and Joe put up an awful howl. We pointed out all the hardships we'd undergone in bringing Woola Woola to Brisbane. Hadn't we spotted his talent, and developed it? The

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idea was ours, wasn't it? Then we appealed to Abie's better nature, which was a waste of time from the start.

"A half!" he said, wiping his eyes.

I looked at Joe, and Joe shrugged.

"O.K.," I sighed. "A half."

Next day I hunted up Chubby Sheldon, and ran him to earth on the sports ground out at New Farm. Well, I couldn't have missed him. He wore the sort of clothes you could see a mile away—a check suit so loud it screamed, a Panama hat, a purple shirt, and a cerise tie. A fat, red-faced guy, who never spoke below a shout.

He was watching two of his wrestlers having a workout, and when he saw me he waved.

"Well, well, well, when did they let you out?" he roared. "Cripes, you're looking thin! They don't feed you any too well in pokey, do they?"

I laughed. After all, I was going to hook him for a few thousand, so I could afford to. I got to talking to him, and gradually led the conversation round to his sprinters. I told him we'd discovered a black fellow who was much faster than his boy, the Sydney Streak—and I had him!

"Want to bet on it?" he said, biting off the end of a cigar a foot long.

That was the reaction I knew I'd get from a man of his gambling temperament. It was inevitable. From then on it was easy; merely a matter of fixing up the details. He suggested two thousand pounds a side, but I explained that Joe and me were in a syndicate with Abie, and that we couldn't go above a thousand.

Then I played my ace. "You think you're betting on a certainty, don't you?" I said.

"Practically," he admitted.

"Then what odds will you give us if our boy lets yours have fifteen yards start?" I asked.

Chubby's eyes bulged. "Fifteen yards?" he wheezed. "You're crazier than a sunstruck bandicoot! There's no one living who could give the Streak two yards in a hundred, let alone fifteen! Is this some sort of a joke?"

"I was never more serious in my life," I told him. "But, of course, we need suitable odds. What's your best offer?"

"I'll give you two to one," Chubby bellowed. "Three to one! No, cripes, I'll give four to one! How can I lose? Four thousand to one thousand."

"Done," I said.

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We shook hands on it, and Chubby looked at me pityingly. " It's like kicking a child in the face," he muttered. " I doubt if I'll be able to sleep at night after this."

We arranged to run off the match two days later on the New Farm track very early in the morning before anyone would be about, because we knew the Brisbane police would take a dim view of a money match like this, involving an aborigine.

" But bring your money in a bag," Chubby told me, when we parted. " Ones and fivers. I don't want any of Abie Mossman's dud cheques! "

Although we tried to keep it dark the news of the match must have got around on the grapevine, because by the time we got to New Farm, just after dawn that Friday, there was quite a crowd strung along the running-track.

Now it isn't the law-abiding element that gets up at dawn to see a money match, and this was as fine a bunch of assorted toughs as ever made a policeman scratch his head. Some of them were hangers-on who sponged on Chubby, some were loafers and bar-flies who'd come because they were curious, and some were out-and-out criminals who would have killed a blind cripple for the price of a drink. And not a cop in sight.

Most of Chubby's stable was there to support him, and you could pick out the Sydney Streak easily enough: a pleasant-looking young guy, lean and brown, in neat running shorts and track shoes. Beside him Woola Woola, with his bowler hat and denim pants and big, bare feet, looked outclassed before the race had even started.

Chubby had his four thousand pounds in a shiny leather case. He opened it up and counted out the bundles of notes in front of us. Abie, true to form, had his thousand quid in an old sack tied at the neck with a shoelace. He let Chubby count the notes, though you could see that it hurt him to let anyone even touch them.

" Well, let's go! " roared Chubby.

We put Woola Woola on the starting line, paced out fifteen generous yards, and placed the Streak there. One of Chubby's trainers had a starting pistol, and called out, " On your marks! "

Then—bang! And they were off.

Right to the last I was scared something terrible might happen, like Woola Woola falling or something. But he didn't. He just gathered speed, caught the Streak in a few strides, passed him and finished up so far in front it wasn't a real contest at all. But it was the most incredible hundred yards in the whole history of track running, and Chubby was dumbfounded.

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"I still don't believe it happened," he kept muttering. "It couldn't! Men don't run as fast as that!"

But he was a dead game sport, and he made a little ceremony of the pay-off. In a short speech he said how honoured he was to have witnessed such an extraordinary event, and that he didn't grudge us our victory.

Then he opened the case, and there was all that money. Four thousand pounds of it, in crisp, clean notes. And a thousand pounds of it was mine! At long, long last my ship had come in.

And then I heard it.

A low, rumbling, mumbling sound coming from our black fellow. "Woola, woola, woola," he was growling; and he was staring at Chubby, the whites of his eyes showing.

A terrible fear clutched my heart. "Stop him, Joe!" I yelled. But I was too late.

Poor old Woola Woola hadn't tasted meat for a long, long time! For weeks he had been living on that mouldy old vegetarian diet, and he was fed up with it. The sight of Chubby Sheldon, plump and pink and juicy, must have been too much for him. Anyway, he gave a sudden growl, deep in his throat, bared his teeth, reached out those long arms of his, and sprang at Chubby.

I never knew Chubby was a runner before, but right then he proved that there is nothing like sheer terror to make a man get up and go. He gave a strangled yelp, and lit out of there with Woola Woola close on his heels. If the Sydney Streak hadn't shoved out his leg and tripped up the black fellow I don't know what would have happened.

As Chubby ran he dropped the bag, and four thousand pounds in notes went skittering on the grass or fluttering in the morning breeze.

I didn't see what happened to Chubby, though we heard afterwards that he ran all the way to Fortitude Valley before collapsing in a heap just outside Warwick Street Railway Station. I didn't see because I was knocked down in the rush.

Yeah, in those few seconds I was bowled over and trampled on by about fifty of Brisbane's toughest citizens, and all I got out of it was one badly-torn five-pound note, and three mashed fingers.

By the time I staggered to my feet the money had gone, and all I could see was a lot of hard-faced bozos running off in all directions with their hands in their pockets.

A little way off Woola Woola lay on the ground. He'd been kicked on the head, which was probably a lucky break for Chubby. When I helped him up he was dazed, though not seriously hurt.

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" For Pete's sake, let's get him away from here and feed him some meat before he causes any more trouble," I said to Joe. " As a money-maker he's a bust. I was toying with the idea of selling him to Chubby, but somehow I don't think Chubby will want him now. What's more, the cops are sure to ask questions, so we'll have to hide him out somewhere till the fuss blows over."

" We'll take him to my brother Charlie's," said Joe, buttoning his coat purposefully. " I know I said I wouldn't, but this is an emergency, and blood's thicker than water."

It was a most disastrous morning, but as we turned to hustle Woola Woola away I saw something that cheered me up a heap. It was Abie Mossman on his knees, rocking himself to and fro, and wailing and wringing his hands in a manner most pitiful to behold.

Three of his front teeth were missing, he had a lump on his head, and some unethical character had swiped his sack with the thousand pounds in it.

There wasn't any doubt about it; Nemesis had finally caught up with Abie.

Well, that all happened a long time ago, but you can check up if you're ever in Australia.

Just go along to the Quigley Brothers' Meat Market in River Street, South Brisbane, and ask for Woola Woola. He's the odd-job man there. It's a most satisfactory arrangement all round, because he does the heavy work, and Charlie and Joe Quigley don't have to pay him any wages, but just keep him in meat. He's as tame as a house-cat, he goes to church with Charlie Quigley every Sunday, and he's so fat that he couldn't run a hundred yards to save his life.

I'm glad things worked out well for him, because I was fond of the poor, faithful savage, and hunger can be a terrible thing.

Yeah, I said the Quigley *Brothers'* Meat Market. You see, Joe bought a partnership in the business for a thousand pounds, much to the surprise of all his friends and acquaintances.

They never could figure out where a bum like Joe ever got hold of a thousand quid, though I believe Abie Mossman could make a pretty close guess.

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★ ★ ★

CHAISE LONGUE?

A woman is a person who reaches for a chair when she answers the telephone.

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CAGED

She was not an animal
to be bought and sold

BY CHRISTOPHER LANDON

WHEN the guards—and they were too strong and tough for him to do anything about it—had thrown him down the wide, marble steps of the presidential palace, they stood over him as he lay in the gutter of the dusty square, kicking him slowly, methodically, about the ribs and stomach for a full minute. Then his hat sailed down to lie beside him, and he was left alone.

Very much alone. Many people passed on the pavement, but they either turned their heads away, or looked right through him. Word had spread quickly that the foreigner, the Englishman, had been thrown out of the front gates of the palace of the president—El Toro—their master. It followed that the man must be an enemy of the state. And there were severe penalties for assisting such enemies, even for getting them on their feet.

Hanson managed it himself at last. He tried to dust himself down, feeling for broken bones, picked up his hat, and then limped across the plaza in the cruel afternoon sunlight to the little café in the far corner where there would be shade, perhaps rest, under the trellis of vines. But he knew he must ask permission first. He was a marked man.

"Is it permitted?" He slumped at the table he had occupied so many times before, and the proprietor was at his elbow: a quiet, balding man, with thick-rimmed glasses, whom he thought to be his friend. Now it might be different.

"Permitted? But of course, senor."

"After that?" Hanson turned his eyes from the shade towards the gleaming white oblong of the president's palace, the only well-kept building in the square.

"I saw that, senor. But I did not see it. All I know is you have had a mishap: perhaps a car accident. If you will come to the back room, it might be easier. I will get you a drink, and my wife can clean your clothes. We have a salve that is good for bruises." He paused and looked Hanson straight in the face. "You were lucky to get out alive, senor."

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" Perhaps . . ." They were in the back room now, and Hanson was stripped, and drinking his tequila in comfort, while slow, sure fingers rubbed the pain out of his back.

" Was it a question of money, or politics? "

" Neither. It was an affair of the heart."

" The heart? " In that instant, the fingers stopped their gentle massage. " But how, senor? "

Hanson asked, " What do you know of me? "

" That you are the Englishman, the one that flies in the plane that can hover like a vulture. That you make good business here, in transporting the stuff they want for the mines in the mountains direct from the coast."

" Yes, a helicopter. I bought it with all my savings. I came out here because it seemed the most likely place to operate. I knew I could not take the big loads of the aeroplanes that land on the top air-strip, but I could drop my load right at the head of the mine shaft instead of wasting a day carrying the stuff up the last fifty miles of the mountains by mule train. I was doing very well, and then—"

" And then our President, that El Toro, sent for you. It must have been brought to his notice that you were doing *too* well, senor."

Hanson laughed. " I suppose so, but the invitation was the kind you could not refuse—a carload of special police calling at my hotel. They were very polite and charming. So was he. He gave me a drink."

" And he wanted money, senor? A cut of the profits? It has happened many times before."

" No. He asked me to do something for him. And, as there was an oblique threat to cancel my licence if I refused, I had to say yes."

The little man did not ask what the request was. For a moment he went on rubbing gently, in silence. Then he said, " But that was business, senor. You mentioned an affair of the heart."

" That came directly from it. When I had agreed to do this favour, it was essential that I went out of the palace unobtrusively, by the back way. There was a guard to escort me, and when we got to the patio . . ." He was silent for a moment, looking back, remembering. " She was sitting by the fountain. I think the first thing that I noticed was how small she was; then, how alone, how unprotected. We started talking—it was easy to bribe the guard to look the other way for a few minutes—and I think I fell in love with her from that first moment." He turned his head and looked at his friend. " You know she is his niece? "

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"So, senor, you have met—and loved—the caged one?"

It was said softly, just as he had heard it whispered in the café and on the dark corners of a side street. The familiar phrase was part of the tangled web of intrigue in this oppressed state: something that, as a foreigner, he had no wish to meddle with. Now it fell into place. It was a personal matter.

"That is what you call her?"

"Yes. We see her only occasionally, riding with that gross beast in his bullet-proof car. As you say, she is so alone. You know that he murdered her father, who was then our President, and his wife? He kept her as some kind of sop to his conscience, I think. We have taken her as a symbol, to keep us going till the time . . ."

His soft words were drowned by the blaring of the loud speakers that were fixed at each corner of the square, and at every intersection throughout the city. It was the first of the president's three-minute pep talks, and it followed the usual pattern.

"Honour the State . . . Pay your taxes . . . Believe in El Toro, who will lead you to better things . . ."

They listened: there was too much noise not to listen. Hanson heard that magnified, hated voice and said, when it was over, "What else does he do?"

"Keeps us in chains, senor. And plays cards. He thinks he is the finest poker player in the world, but it is easy to be that when no one you play against dares to beat you." Then he went on, in just the same soft tone, "You have not told the end of this affair of the heart. The thing that happened today."

"We met often like that; every time I had to go to the palace. The guards could always be bribed to let us have a few moments. But today—he must have learnt of it—he found us, and—" Hanson's gesture indicated the method of his own rough and rapid ejection.

"And now? You will pack your bag, fly away to make money in a happier country? You are lucky."

"No," said Hanson. "When my clothes are ready, I'm going back to the palace."

"Back to the palace! What for? It is madness." The man looked at him aghast.

Hanson shook his head. "I was in the wrong. I want to apologise. He did what any South American parent or guardian would do, only he got someone else to carry out the rough work for him. I'll go back and say I'm sorry; then ask him, in the proper manner, if I can marry her." He paused, smiled gently. "We might even have a game of cards."

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The woman came back with his suit brushed and pressed, and placed it over the arm of a chair. When she had gone, the proprietor said slowly, " If you do that, I swear you will never get out alive."

" Perhaps . . . perhaps not." Hanson grunted with stiffness as he pulled on his trousers. "But if not, my friend, I leave with you one titbit of information that might avenge me, and also help to further your movement. Would you care to know the nature of my private business with El Toro? "

" Anything that discredits him will help in the end."

" I told you that he was very charming to me, apart from the veiled threat to cancel my licence that first time I saw him. On his desk were two briefcases, exactly alike, and when I had agreed to do him this favour, he said, ' Here is a present for you, senor: a token of my esteem.'

" He pointed, and I picked up the briefcase nearest to me. It was new, but made to look old. I said, ' Thank you, Excellency.' He said, ' Don't thank me yet, lift the other one.' And before I did it, he laughed. ' You have a good pair of shoulders, senor. Try to make it look natural.' "

" But why? "

Hanson worked himself into his jacket. " I wondered, too, until I tried to move it. Although, as I have told you, it was the same size and shape as the other, I could hardly lift it off the desk.

" El Toro just smiled and said, ' Now hold it easily, as if it was the other one. That shoulder is sagging.' And when I had done so, he went on, ' Can you walk out of the palace like that to your car? Can you take it from there to the plane, so that no one watching will notice the heaviness? ' And I said, ' Of course, Excellency.' I was thinking of my licence."

" And what happened then, senor? "

" He scribbled something on a piece of paper. It was the address of the biggest bank in the capital of the country that borders yours on the coast. He said, ' Take the case there, senor, and bring it back when you return. But do not be inquisitive about the contents and we shall not quarrel . . ."

" And you did it? "

" I did. I had to think of my licence. I carried it eight times in all but, of course, in the end my curiosity got the better of me."

" So you opened the bag? "

" Yes. On the way to the coast, when it was heavy. It was easy to put the helicopter down in a clearing. The lock was not a difficult one to pick."

The proprietor asked, " Money? Wads of banknotes? "

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Hanson laughed. " No. He's wilier than that. He knows better than to trust his own currency if anything should happen to make him run for it. It was something quite different—thin sheets of platinum from the mines." He straightened his shoulders. " That information might be useful to your friends, if I don't come back."

" But you are not really—? "

" Of course. As I said. And I hope to see you later."

The proprietor watched the broad back get smaller and smaller in the distance as it disappeared across the dusty square. " Very brave—or quite crazy," he said softly to himself.

The guards may have been tough and strong, but they were also morons. The officer had had orders to throw Hanson out of the palace, but there had been no instructions about re-entry. Hanson still had his pass, a pass was a pass, and the guard had accepted his bribes on previous occasions, so he was let in.

The aide who met him in an outer office seemed flabbergasted when he heard Hanson's request that he should brave the presence with this outrageous demand for an interview.

When he returned there was a faint smile on his face, a furtive licking of lips in anticipation of pleasure to come. In ten minutes Hanson was walking for the last time up to the broad desk in that ornate room.

He looked just like a bull, El Toro, as he lounged in the high-backed chair: the thick, knotted neck beaded in sweat from the damp heat that oozed through the closed, bullet-proof shutters; there was no glint from the hooded, reptile eyes; they were looking down at a pack of cards that was being ruffled from one hairy hand to the other.

Hanson stood quite still, waiting. There was no sound but the soft slither of the cards: El Toro did not look up.

At last he said, " So they did not throw you out hard enough, eh? The next time I will see they do better."

" Before that, Excellency, I would like to tell you why I have returned. It is to apologise. I should not have tried to see your niece without your permission."

The pack of cards hit the top of the desk with a sharp click. For the first time the dictator was looking at him. " That is a little better, my friend. I accept your apology. Now get out and never come back! "

Hanson gulped. " I have something more to say, Excellency. Having met your niece, I have fallen in love with her, and she with me. I wish to ask you, as her guardian, for her hand in marriage."

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There was a glint in those eyes now; not of anger, which Hanson had expected, but of amazement and contempt. "And what honour, may I ask, do you think this alliance would bring to my house?" the voice asked silkily.

"Not much, sir. A little representation, perhaps. I mix easily with the people—"

"Thank you, but I do not need a public relations officer. I, myself, give them all the information that is desirable." El Toro looked at his watch, and pressed the switch of the table microphone in front of him. "Honour the state . . . pay your taxes." The voice sounded very soft in comparison with the monstrous blare Hanson had heard before from the loud speakers at the street corners.

"Anything else?"

It was said so offensively, after the microphone had been switched off, that Hanson lost his temper. "Perhaps it would be well, Excellency, to have on *your* side someone who knows a little about your personal affairs."

"So you looked, and you know!" It was almost a hiss. "You fool . . . you poor fool! Do you realise you will never get out of here alive?"

A cold stone in the pit of his stomach; the rueful thought that it was entirely his own fault; then the urgency to gain time. Hanson tried to keep his voice steady.

"A condemned man is usually granted one last favour."

"Yes. If it is reasonable." The eyes had left his now; were fixed once more on the cards that slid with a soft sound between the two hands.

"I hear you like a game of poker, Excellency."

"Provided the stakes are high enough to make it interesting."

"I hear you always win."

"I am a good player, my friend."

"I hear that you win only because an opponent is too terrified to have the audacity to beat you. I am not. I have a little money on me. It might last long enough to make the game amusing."

El Toro smiled; a slant of sunlight glinted on three gold teeth. "That money is mine already. The property of criminals belongs to the state."

"Perhaps it would afford you more pleasure if it had been won, rather than taken."

"As you say, it would be more amusing." The cards stopped flowing in their cascade, and dropped with a sharp crack on the top of the desk. "What shall we play? Stud poker, whisky, draw? And the stakes? I do not play for chicken feed."

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"Draw," said Hanson, "and, as long as we start with level chips, the higher the stake the better."

El Toro nodded. "That is agreed. Then pull up a chair, senor. I will teach you your last lesson."

It takes time to assess any opponent; longest of all when one is playing for the highest stake. It was not many minutes before Hanson knew he was facing a born poker player, someone with two of the cardinal virtues of the game: boldness, and an ability to show no emotion at all. It did not take long to find that out, but it was very expensive.

It was only when Hanson's chips had drifted away, leaving a mere handful, that he found out the one, most important thing: the more El Toro won, the more recklessly bold he became. His audacity sprang from the ineradicable conviction that he could never lose, and he was fast becoming careless. Hanson wondered how often a wretched aide had sat in his chair, too frightened to call a bluff or put down a better hand.

"It looks like the last hand," El Toro said with deadly quiet and a scathing undertone of regret, as he eyed the small pile of chips opposite him. He pressed a button at the side of the desk. A drawer slid open. The big German automatic he put on the desk facing Hanson looked cold, squat, terrifying.

"A pity. I was just beginning to enjoy the game. It was becoming interesting." Hanson found it hard to keep his voice steady.

"But you have nothing left to play with."

"I have, Excellency. But it is not with me. You must take my word for it. In a bank in the town on the coast there is an insurance policy on my life. I have no relatives; have made no will. If I sign a paper now, making you my heir, it would be quite valuable."

It was a long time before El Toro stopped laughing. "Yes, yes, I like that!" he spluttered. "You have a sense of humour, my friend. Here is pen and paper. How much is this fortune-to-be of yours? I will take your word for it."

"Five thousand dollars."

"Then I will give you four thousand dollars' worth of chips. Take it or leave it."

The grilled pattern of the sunlight that streamed through the closed shutters lengthened as the late afternoon wore on. Twice an aide came in to whisper that it was time to make the evening announcement, only to be snarled at and ordered away. El Toro was engaged in a more important matter.

They played on, and now Hanson, knowing the other's

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weakness and vanity, took advantage of it, watchfully, steadily. The drain on his new pile of chips came to a halt—and then they started flowing back from the other side of the table.

He was now dealing with an opponent who made mistakes, who was angry as well as reckless, whose judgment had gone because he was so anxious to win. He was playing against someone who would raise him on a one-card buy, who would take the long chance of filling a straight or a flush. The trickle towards him became a stream. Then, almost too suddenly, as the first breath of the evening breeze started to stir the shutters, there was nothing left to play against.

El Toro stood up slowly, dropping the automatic back into the drawer, but neglecting to close it.

"You win." It was said through clenched teeth. "You have taken all. Unless I can put up more money."

"With all the State Bank at your bidding, Excellency, that would be a little unfair."

"Very well, I shall keep my word. Give me back the four thousand that you borrowed. Here is your paper. You have just twelve hours to get out of this country, without speaking to a soul, or else . . ." His hand drifted towards the gun in the open drawer in front of him.

"No!"

Hanson pushed all his winnings towards the middle of the desk. "The lot—on one cold hand. If you are prepared to put up the stake, I want to match it."

"And that is?"

"Your niece."

There was a heavy silence as they stood facing each other.

Then Hanson said softly, "And I'd like to see that stake on, or near, the table."

For a moment he thought he had gone too far: that might would win over reason. But El Toro controlled himself; took his hand off the gun, and spoke quietly into a telephone. "She is coming to watch," was all he said.

She came gliding silently into the room—no sound save the click of the door as she closed it behind her. She was tiny, with pale, oval face, and blue-black hair piled high on the top of her head.

There was only a second's hesitation when she saw him. "Harry! But I didn't know . . . I thought you . . ."

El Toro purred at her. "You were wrong, my chicken. This one is too clever. He played a game of cards with me for his life, and won. Now he has staked all that again—on you."

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She moved close to him on the far side of the desk; but she looked only at Hanson as she answered, " I am not an animal, to be bought and sold."

" But you are my ward. You will do as I direct."

" Yes, Uncle." There was an infinite contempt in that last word.

Silence while the cards were dealt; no question of not coming in on this last hand of all. Hanson picked up his five cards one by one. Three aces, two nines. A full house. Good enough to bluff on. " No cards," he said.

El Toro picked up his hand very slowly. Hanson watched him fan out the cards. He looked up for a second to see the sweat pricking out in beads on the dictator's face. For the first time there was a hint of emotion in those eyes. Was it triumph, or was it the knowledge of fear?

" No cards." The voice was thick suddenly; the confirmation of what Hanson had seen in those eyes.

" Then it is my down, Excellency."

" Yes. And I hope it is a good one."

Hanson laid his cards on the desk. " A full house."

For a moment before the hand moved towards the gun, Hanson knew he had won. He knew that out of the habit of always being right, out of that very conceit, his opponent had misjudged him once more. But it was not much good to look with satisfaction at the five hearts that had been thrown on the desk face upwards. El Toro's hand was holding the gun, and it was pointing straight at Hanson's stomach.

" So you win again, my friend, but not for long." The thick voice snarled. " No one wins against El Toro for long. *No one.* I think you cheat. You must cheat. That is not allowed . . ."

Hanson's fingernails were biting into the arms of his chair. He was ready to spring, but the width of the desk top was too great to make escape certain. For the last time he tried to keep his voice steady.

" If you think I substitute cards, search me. But how do you think I could match a fancy pack like yours? "

El Toro's answer was the whitening of the knuckle of his trigger finger as he started to squeeze. The silence was broken only by his heavy breathing.

Hanson started to say his prayers.

The girl, who had been standing so still and straight beside her uncle, said with sudden sharpness, " What's that? " and swung towards the window.

For a second, the dictator's eyes flickered in the same direction,

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and in that second she acted with horrifying speed. Her left arm came up, hand clawing at his close-cropped hair, jerking his head back; her right, encircling the arm that held the gun, twisted it towards his throat as her fingers clamped round those on the trigger. The two shots, as she pressed, sounded no louder than short, sharp coughs.

"Lock the door!"

As he turned back from the door, she let the dictator's head fall forward on the table. The blood started to spill from his mouth to stain the cards and chips.

She looked at Hanson steadily, without any trace of emotion. "He murdered my father . . . shot him in the back. Then he killed my mother. After that, he kept me caged like an animal, tried to sell me as one. And when he lost, he tried to use his power to cheat. Can there be any regrets?"

She bent forward, switching on the desk microphone. He could hear the soft echo of her voice coming from the loud speakers outside in the square. "Friends, it is all over. The tyrant is dead. I, the caged one, have freed us with my own hand. Come to the palace and release me."

The murmur outside grew to a roar—then came the sound of running feet.

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SOLUTIONS to TIME OF DAY on page 72

1. *The peak period of the Russian Revolution, October-November, 1917.*
2. *Extension of time allowed for settlement of bills after they become legally due.*
3. *The astronomical day extends from noon till noon, instead of midnight to midnight.*
4. *a. The Marx Brothers ; b. Spencer Tracy.*
5. *a. happy ; b. green ; c. one.*
6. 1916.
7. *a. Lewis Carroll ; b. Rudyard Kipling ; c. Shakespeare.*

SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD on page 144

Across. 1, *Regicide.* 5, *Russet.* 9, *Free will.* 10, 14, *George Washington.* 11, *Respects.* 12, *French.* 18, *Hard astern.* 22, *Saw-pit.* 23, *Dynamite.* 24, *Bairns.* 25, *Truthful.* 26, *Engulf,* 27, *Telegram.*

Down. 1, *Reform.* 2, *Greasy.* 3, *Cowper.* 4, *Dilettante.* 6, *Unerring.* 7, *Strength.* 8, *Teething.* 13, *Cherry-tree.* 15, *Chasuble.* 16, *Browning.* 17, *National.* 19, *Rattle.* 20, *Differ.* 21, *Bedlam.*

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FEATHER IN HER HAT

He hadn't noticed it before

BY LESLIE GORDON BARNARD

IMPULSIVE as always, the Colonel had done the thing out of hand, wiring George almost casually afterwards that he was married again, and letting the chips fall where they would. More than one chip fell on George's shoulder. It certainly was a blow that his father, after surviving a couple of decades of being a somewhat elderly plum which many women had tried to pluck off the tree of widowerhood, should have fallen at last.

Colonel Wentworth was a veteran of campaigns, a man good with horses, rifles, fishing tackle—definitely the outdoor type, which made him an excellent companion for a son of George's likes and temperament. And now the Colonel was bringing this woman up here, of all places, into a man's domain, where the amenities were purposefully few and the life remote and a bit rugged.

Scraps of instructions whirled in George's protesting brain as he waited for the train to arrive, communication by highway being almost nil in these parts. *Be sure the best bedroom is well aired and tidy . . . Tell Al*—Al was the cook and handyman—*I'd be obliged if he'd shave and put on his best shirt. Make certain there are no fish-scales in the motor-boat . . .* Things like that.

Your new mother, one letter said, *has lived a rather sheltered life. She is, George, if one dare use the words in these days, delicately reared. I wouldn't wish the experience of coming up to be too rugged for her.*

Just when George thought he had things pretty well in hand, even to bribing Al to shave and shirt himself becomingly, this other complication blew up. For a moment he was tempted to wire the Colonel not to come, but decided that was exactly what would bring him, smelling battle from afar, and perhaps even forgetting the amenities necessary for Mother. *You will please call her that, George*, his father had written. George could only hope that the steps being taken would clear the situation in time, but this was not so yet, though the passage of the motor-boat

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down the lake to the station had been without incident . . .

Hands thrust grimly in his pockets, George Wentworth heard the scream of the train, then a slow chuff-chuffing up the steep slope, then a relaxed chuff-chuffing as it slid into the station, jerked to a stop. And in a moment the Colonel was saying, "George, this is your new mother. Mother, this is George."

"How do you do, dear," Mother said sweetly.

George was swallowing hard. He had to admit the Old Man knew how to pick and choose. Father had come up with a china doll; with something out of an old miniature. Mother's hair was a becoming grey, her cheeks were naturally rosy, her eyes very blue. She looked as if she'd break if you dropped her. George could understand now why the Colonel had sent those urgent messages ahead.

Joe Harris, the stationmaster, and several loungers were standing about pop-eyed. The platform, as Joe confessed afterwards, had never seen anything the like of this.

George beckoned Joe over and introduced him.

"How do you do, Mr. Harris," Mother said, and shook Joe's hand, and was given a good, prolonged view of his two missing front teeth, or the gaps where they'd been, dating from the time a rifle had kicked back at him years ago. George drew his father aside and told him the news.

"But this is preposterous," cried the Colonel. "Is nothing being done about it?"

"We just can't catch up with him," George said. "He certainly knows the bush. There are traces, but so far—"

"Intolerable!" said the Colonel.

George shook his head. "We're convinced it's a crank. He leaves notices about saying this lake is for the birds and fishes alone, and warning us all off."

"And you mean he actually snipes at people?"

"He does," George said.

"This," the Colonel declared, "must be stopped."

George was in entire agreement.

"You should have wired me," Colonel Wentworth told his son testily. "A woman like Mother shouldn't be exposed to such an outrage. I've a good mind to take her right back."

"On what?" George asked reasonably, as there was only one train a day in each direction, and both had now gone.

It was at this moment they both realised that Mother, having broken away from the stunned inarticulateness of Joe Harris, was listening in. "Just what is all this about?" she was asking.

George, seeing she knew already, explained.

"But," Mother said, wide-eyed, "you don't mean that's any

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reason why we shouldn't go on to the Lodge? I'm sure I've read somewhere that it takes a lot of bullets to kill even one person. Doesn't it, William? You should know."

The Colonel twisted his moustache-ends.

"Couldn't we start?" Mother asked sweetly. "All this waiting around is just a little—fatiguing."

Instantly the Colonel was all attention. "I was afraid of that," he said. "It was a mistake to bring you."

"Is that very polite?" Mother asked.

"Sorry," the Colonel apologised, "it was just—"

Mother put a hand on the rough tweed of his sports jacket to show she understood, or was trying to.

"O.K.," George shrugged. "Let's go."

He helped the Colonel carry the luggage down to where a motor-boat rocked gently. It was not too clean a motor-boat, though George's hands wouldn't be the same for weeks after his efforts. It had been used mostly for fishing; but George had made it as immaculate as possible, and had brought a rug and some cushions for Mother to sit on.

The Colonel established her carefully and stepped in, and George got aboard, too. Beyond a small, green inlet lay the openness of the lake from which thickly-tree'd hills rose steeply.

"We could wait till darkness," the Colonel said.

George nodded a gloomy assent.

Mother looked at them both. "But how silly," she said. "Isn't this fun? Are you men afraid?"

The Colonel allowed himself to betray pain. He lifted a paddle and vented his anger on the bank, which crumbled under his thrust and almost precipitated him into the water.

"You do understand," the Colonel warned, "this crackbrain may take pot-shots at us any time."

"Really?" Mother looked almost pleased. "Do you know I've never been shot at, dear?" George coughed. He kicked the engine into activity, and steered the craft in a curving thrust through the green waters. In the bow, gripping the gunwales sturdily, the Colonel raked the surface with his gaze.

Reflected in the still waters as they moved out from shore was Mother's delicate and lovely image. George cherished a faint suspicion that the trout might rise for a look; certainly nothing approaching this had any of them seen since they were spawned.

They were a good three-quarters of the way across, George judged, when it happened: two shots rang out in reasonably quick succession. Two bullets pinged past them, furrowing the waters beyond the boat.

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"Quick," Colonel Wentworth shouted in his best army manner, "turn left in under the point, George. Snappy now!" But George needed no urging.

The curve of the boat almost brought the lake waters in and sent his father out; but they made it to the shore where the Colonel, rising amidships bravely but unsteadily, reached out an urgent arm and latched on to an overhanging bough.

"Out you get, my dear," he ordered.

"But why?" Mother asked.

"Per—perhaps you're right," the Colonel agreed, forgetting that on such small points of strategy he had spent hours of argument in more than one mess-room. "Stay here. I shall go ashore."

"But what for, William?"

"To hunt for the scoundrel," the Colonel said fiercely. "We just can't have this kind of thing going on." And he started with great resolution, after setting a first tentative foot ashore.

Mother looked at the seat of the Colonel's trousers as he crawled up through the underbrush, and she said, "George, somebody should look after him. He's not even armed. You go and keep an eye on him. There's no telling what mischief he may get into."

George asked doubtfully, "Will you be all right here?"

"Why shouldn't I be?" Mother wanted to know. George had one or two answers but he, too, was concerned about Father's commando performance. He glanced back once or twice but Mother just waved. "I'll be all right," she promised, "and there's quite a pleasant view from here."

The bushes closed between her and George, who had quite a job overtaking the Colonel, now clearly embarked on a flanking movement. George flanked with him. It was an uncomfortable business, with slap-happy twigs and ubiquitous burrs. Eventually George overtook him. "Rough going," he panted.

The Colonel, sweating, breathless, and incoherent, refused to admit any such thing. "Nonsense," he said, finding his breath with difficulty. "Listen now!" He cocked an ear and George followed suit; but all they heard was a flutter of wings, the movement of some small creature, and the wind gently whispering.

"I could have sworn the fellow was somewhere up here," the Colonel managed, after a moment of reducing blood-pressure. "We must have flushed our bird." They listened again; in a sudden convulsive movement each man grabbed the other.

"A shot!" the Colonel gasped. "Down that way."

Undoubtedly it came from their rear. It was down near the water. It was—their alarmed exchange of glances said—down where they had left Mother.

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For a moment all stealth and strategy was cast to the winds. George and his father half fell, half stumbled their way down the hillside, sounding not unlike a small herd of elephants on the loose. Only when they got well within the target area did the Colonel's sense of strategy return to him. "Steady," he commanded. "Steady. Mustn't panic, George. Easy does it."

He put up a hand and brushed beads of sweat from his forehead before proceeding. They finessed their way until suddenly both stopped. "Voices!" the Colonel pronounced sibilantly. Undoubtedly voices. Mother's—and a man's.

"Someone," the Colonel said with relief, "has come to her aid."

George's hands made weaving motions in the green before him, and so parted the last curtain of bushes.

Mother was sitting there, quite regally, in the boat. With her, talking with the greatest amiability and concord, was a man. A tall, thin, unshaven, berry-stained, bush-torn man.

"It's *him*," George said, his voice sounding hollow . . .

"Impossible," the Colonel breathed; but George could fancy the hair—what there was of it—rising on his father's head.

Something else was rising in the Colonel that made George say quickly, "Take it easy. She's got the fellow well in hand."

In fact, the two were talking so agreeably that it was easy for George and his father suddenly to break cover and take the fellow before he could put up any resistance.

"Oh, dear," Mother cried, "do be nice to him! We were having such a friendly conversation."

By this time the sound of shooting close to the water had brought reinforcements, including the newly-shaved Al, in his clean shirt. They shepherded the man away.

Mother, watching rather sadly, said, "It's too bad, but I suppose it's for everybody's good—including his own—isn't it?"

George said that it was. The Colonel said nothing. There was still a glazed look in his eyes.

Mother put a hand on his tweed sleeve and said, "I think it was wonderful, dear, the way you went ashore after him."

Father, coming out of his coma, said, "Oh, really? Yes?" and relapsed again.

George got the boat under way. The sound of the engine seemed to rouse the Colonel, who sat up suddenly and said, "It would help if you'd tell us what happened."

He looked straight and hard at Mother. So did George.

Mother said, "I read somewhere—in a book—that the way to handle anyone like that was just to—to go along with them, to

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agree with them. And I do think he had a point. About the birds and the fishes, you know," Mother said, screwing her eyes prettily. " We got along splendidly once he knew I was on his side."

The sound the Colonel made was quite indeterminate. He put his head between his hands and stared down at a fish-scale or two George had failed to expurgate. Suddenly he roused himself. " The fellow had a rifle," he said, " what happened to it? "

" How stupid of me not to mention it," Mother said. " I do hope it can be salvaged. Maybe George could add it to his collection. I was sorry to do it," Mother confessed, " but when he was busy talking I just slipped it overboard. It seemed best. I thought that when you two came back he might be upset again. You do see what I mean? "

George said he saw.

The Colonel said nothing, but every little while above the racket of the engine, he gave something like a snort. From time to time he would look at the woman he had married and then, in a dazed sort of way, contemplate the farther horizons.

When they got to the Lodge, Mother said, " George, I really think your father should have a good rest. He's sort of—played out, isn't he? "

And indeed the Colonel was. He consented presently to stretch out his lean body on the rustic chaise-longue under the pine trees, and relapsed first into meditation and then into sleep.

It was when George had conferred with Al and the others that he went back into the Lodge, and found Mother busy with a small sewing kit, her hat in her hands. Suddenly it occurred to George that in all the excitement he hadn't noticed she'd been wearing a hat before, and not after, the incident in the boat. Now something in Mother's manner made him draw near.

Looking at him with a smile, Mother said, " George, which way do you think this feather would look best if I moved it over? You see, it—well, it happened before he came near enough for me to have a conversation with him."

George took a closer look and gave a little gasp.

" Don't breathe a word of this to your father, will you, dear? William fusses so much about me over trifles."

She went back to sewing the bright feather over the bullet-hole in her hat. © Leslie Gordon Barnard 1959

★ ★ ★

Woman's place is in the wrong

JAMES THURBER

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SWEEPING BEAUTY

Fuming, she stamped bare, hennaed toes on the pavement

BY MARY TURNER

SULEIMAN BIN DAOUD had slept too long. The centuries pressed their leaden weight upon his fame and his power; his hands were dust, and the terrible words of his seal grew faint under the drift of the years.

The great spirits began to stir where they were bound, some in the sea, some under the mountains, others in all sorts of unlikely places not really suitable for a djinn. They had been imprisoned in the glory of gold, barred up with the fire of rubies, gorgeous in scarlet and Tyrian purple, snowy marble and ebony limbs, scented fountains, vanishing palaces, and a million variegated sins. They burst out into a world of pink plastic teacups, deodorant advertisements, and Council estates, and I shouldn't care to repeat the things they said when they found out.

Ernie and Perce swept the quiet lane by the abattoir on Thursday mornings. The pin-headed boy who pushed the electric rubbish-barrow kept on down Station Road and picked up their little heap of rubbish as he passed the corner, so they were on their own for a few minutes. They came upon the bottle halfway along.

Ernie was like the gentleman whose sole exploit in the war was to have stayed alive. He was so little and walnut-looking that you'd have thought he'd grown on a bush, if it hadn't been obvious that he must have had parents in order to inherit such a long inventory of physical defects.

He'd been in the world for an indefinite number of years, and none of the things that constantly happened to him, mostly unpleasant, had ever surprised him in the least.

"Them dogs," said Ernie, brooming away. "Makes work, I always say, don' it, Perce?"

Perce was a good lad. That was another of the things Ernie always said. Mind you, he couldn't talk proper, and he was apt to get the eye-wobble if he looked at anything too carefully, but he was a good lad. Ernie looked out for Perce, seeing that Perce couldn't look out for himself too well.

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Perce said, " Uh! "

" Cor, look at that," said Ernie. He pushed it with his broom. " That's a dir'y great bottle, that is."

Perce brushed on. Once you started Perce, he went on till you told him to stop. " 'Old on a sec, Perce."

They stood in the gutter, Perce's busted tennis shoes and Ernie's tiny rubber boots that he wore winter and summer, and which even his landlady thought were a bit strong, although, goodness knows, she had a robust sense of smell.

They prodded the bottle, and they rolled it a little, and found it was corked. Perce's eyes wobbled like mad, and Ernie said, " Bit of all right if it was a drop o' wallop, eh, Perce? " and then he looked both ways for any sight of the foreman, and he had his crooked little fingers on the cork—not a real cork, some kind of clay stuff with marks on—and it was out in his hand as if it had jumped there.

" Disiffectant! " Ernie moaned, disgusted. " Creosote or somefink."

It certainly made some fumes. When he'd stopped coughing and patting poor old Perce on the back, and they'd both wiped their noses on their old Army greatcoat sleeves, they still couldn't see properly for tears. Well, it stands to reason: you don't *really* see a young lady in pantomime clothes, and not much of them, standing in the lane behind the abattoir on Thursday morning. Dark, too, she was.

" Speak, O my master; for thy servant waiteth," said the Djinnia. Suleiman bin Daoud had known all about conditioned reflexes long before Pavlov invented them, and the poor girl couldn't help herself.

" She'll be one of them West Indians," Ernie muttered to Perce, with oblique glances. " There's one wot's a clippie on my bus."

The Djinnia wriggled her hips. Admittedly they were covered, but only with some stuff you could see through.

" Gawd," said Ernie. " I couldn't 'arf 'ave done with that pint o' wallop wot we didn't find."

She went and returned with no more than a moderate explosion of flame, and proffered a crystal goblet encrusted with gold and jewels in rather poor taste, worth several kings' ransoms. It was filled with wine, and had snow from the Persian mountains still clinging to its stem.

Ernie found the snow cold to his fingers. He peered into the goblet. " Thanks ever so, miss," he said dubiously. " I won't 'ave none just now. Me doctor says I didn't oughter drink minerals becos o' me ulster. I got a gastric stummick."

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The Djinnia vanished the goblet.

It began to rain; drops fell on the gleaming skin of her dark bosom and immediately sizzled off in steam.

"Come on, Perce." They started brushing again. "Excuse us, miss," said Ernie, hooking an old ice-cream carton from behind her left ankle, "only the foreman might be along and we don't want nuffink said."

She followed them.

"And another thing, Perce, you don't want to say nuffink to your mum, see, 'cos it might upset 'er." Perce's mum had had fifteen and brought them all up respectable, even if not very bright. Ernie didn't think Perce's mum would care for them gauze jeans, not the way they showed. Perce's mum probably wouldn't have liked a large ruby worn in the navel, either, even if, like Ernie, she had supposed it to come from Woolworth's.

It rained harder than ever.

"Wish we 'ad a inside job, don' you, Perce?"

"Uh. Uh. Uh-uh."

"That's right."

The Djinnia drew an incandescent arabesque with her fingertips, and the lane behind the abattoir was immediately roofed and floored with gold, chalcedony, beryl, onyx, marbles of infinite beauty, priceless cedar-wood. Cushions of vivid silks were strewn everywhere and the scent of exotic blossoms made the air languorous with delight. Poor old Perce sneezed terribly, he got the hayfever something cruel in the summer.

"Look 'ere, miss," said Ernie, "no offence meant, and none taken, I 'ope, but we got our job to do and if people keep on interferin' there's goin' to be somefink said. Just you take orl this away; why, makes me feel as if I was sweepin' the ladies' toilets at the Odeon, it does!"

And as it all went Whoosh and vanished, he confided to Perce that it felt nice to be out in the rain again, Gawd 'elp 'im.

He hadn't lived till whatever age it was without being careful; you've got to be careful when you're only four foot eleven and you haven't got any money or any brains or anything else anybody takes any notice of. He thought like anything, and he thought this was just the kind of young lady wot got things *said*; he wouldn't be surprised if she was One of Those!

The best thing, Ernie decided, was to pretend she wasn't there and just carry on. Then, if there was trouble, nobody could say it was his fault, or Perce's either. So he wielded his brush, closed his nostrils to the musky gusts of perfume stepping along on his heels, and made conversation to Perce.

"Loverly film at the Odeon, Perce."

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" Oo! Oo! Ah," agreed Perce.

Ernie hadn't really seen the film. He couldn't afford to. By the time he'd paid for his bed-sitter (you sat on the bed if you wanted to sit) and his drop of wallop and his fags, somehow he was always broke. But he'd studied the posters, taking an hour of an evening to drink them in, with his poor, misshapen nose pressed up close to get a good view.

" Bit of orl right, that is."

" Uh."

Enthusiasm woke in Ernie as he remembered. " That Mitzi Bustenhalter, Perce. Bit of orl right, orl right." He'd already forgotten the morning's anxieties as he talked. " Yer know, Perce, I wouldn't mind 'aving 'er for me birfday surprise, I wouldn't," he said, with a wicked little cackle.

From the whiff of sulphur, he'd have thought it was Friday when they swept down by the gas-works. There was a soft thump behind him.

Wherever Miss Bustenhalter had been when the Djinnia collected her, it must have been night-time. It wasn't a very ample nightgown, and the journey had disarranged it a good deal.

" My lord's command is obeyed," recited the Djinnia. She executed a salacious squirm. " My lord will see that the maiden is in a deep sleep," she added lewdly.

Ernie was really cross.

" Now look 'ere," he squeaked, " you'll get me the sack, you will. What you think I'm going to do with 'er, eh? "

The Djinnia told him.

Ernie backed away in a glow of embarrassment. Perce accidentally trod on Miss Bustenhalter, not having noticed her, and uttered a warbling screech.

" Now you've upset poor old Perce. You don' want ter do that. Oh, I don' know 'ow we'll go on, I'm sure; I ain't well enough for this kinda carry-on, makes me feel orl alike it does! "

The Djinnia considered. She looked Ernie up, and she looked him down—not very far either way. A gleam of intelligence lit up her handsome but not very modest face. She stamped her bare, hennaed toes on the pavement, making a horrible great hole that broke the electric cable and the gas-main and only just missed going as deep as the sewer.

Ernie felt his clothes whip away from him like autumn leaves in a gale. He cried in anguish, " Mizzle orf now, do! "

The Djinnia obediently and—as she imagined—tactfully, mizzled off, and left them all there; Perce sweeping onward,

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Miss Bustenhalter seductively asleep in the gutter; the foreman just coming round the corner upon them; and Ernie.

Only poor old Ernie wasn't himself at all.

He was seven foot high, coal-black, and exuding flame from his eyes and nostrils. His turban gleamed with a thousand priceless jewels; they all had to be there, because he wasn't wearing any other clothes to put them in—mind you, it would have been a shame to cover up that figure with clothes, it was worth looking at.

The Djinnia, flying through the upper atmosphere in smug satisfaction, felt that she'd made her lord truly worthy to deal with Miss Bustenhalter, and any other maidens he fancied as well.

It was a pity she hadn't helped him also to deal with the foreman; but that was a different problem, and you can't have everything, can you?

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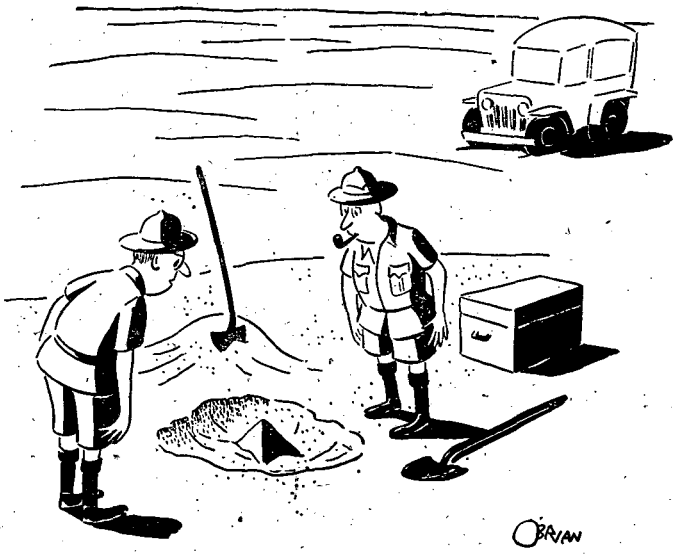

" This could be the discovery of the century. Depending, of course, on how far down it goes."

Drawing by O'Brian

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THE ACHILLES AFFAIR

By BERKELY MATHER

At the end of a stiff desert course in weapon-training and parachute-jumping under Sergeant Finnessy and Tony—that professor-emeritus of the pistol and the sub-machine gun—I found myself no longer Guards Corporal Peter Feltham but Stavro, an agent commissioned in the secret wartime set-up called the Firm—the operational H.Q. of the Resistance, parachuting arms and officers to Balkan Partisans. A fellow officer, code name Andreas, and I were parachuted in as Balkan shepherds to meet up with an influential Greek guerrilla

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leader, known as Achilles, who wanted our mortars and Stens. On the way back from our rendezvous, taken prisoner by a Nazi patrol, we escaped over the prison roof, and Andreas led me somehow down the sheer wall of a cliff, and half carried me to the submarine waiting to take us out.

Later, summoned to Cairo H.Q., I learnt from Bill, our Colonel, that Achilles was collaborating with the Boche, and had captured Andreas. Parachuted back, I clambered down the valley where we had run into the Nazi patrol. This time I would make no mistake. I strode out jauntily. It was as I rounded a bend in the track that the man rose from behind a boulder.

THE man was lean, brown, and sinewy—dressed much the same as I was, but perhaps just a shade dirtier.

His matted beard and the grizzled hair that stuck out haystack-wise from under his twisted head-scarf gave him an appearance of age that was belied by the steadiness with which he covered the region of my navel with an ancient, but quite serviceable shotgun. They load that sort with small rivets on top of about four ounces of black powder.

He said, "Halt!" in the local dialect, and in a form of the imperative that meant just that.

I halted—and I tried to smile ingratiatingly. He gestured with the gun—only about an eighth of an inch, and without uncovering much of my quavering belly.

I walked on in the direction he indicated and he fell in behind me. My brain was spinning like a mouse-propelled treadmill.

I had three cover stories. If this was one of Achilles' men, I was here on a joint mission to find out what had happened to Andreas and, as a sweetener, to arrange an arms-drop, as large as it was chimerical, in the not too distant future. If he belonged to Chrios, then my yarn would more approximate the truth. If, God forbid, he was one of the pro-Nazi Grineac, then my spiel was a horse of yet another colour. Whichever he was, the ensuing bluff was going to make a Reno poker game look like tiddleywinks.

I stumbled on feeling like a sheep going up a slaughterhouse ramp or perhaps, more appropriately, a goat. I had been the goat all right all the way through this piece, ever since Captain Anonymous Andreas had picked me off the rifle range.

A spasm of impotent rage almost choked me. I clenched my fists and, in doing so, my tensing arm muscles felt the lump the .45 made under my left armpit. That brought sanity, and the merest, forlornest ray of hope. Could I drop flat and roll sideways before that withering blast tore the back out of me? A shotgun, particularly that type of blunderbuss, spreads wide but, having once been fired, it is as useless as a broomstick until it has been reloaded. Could I risk it?

We were approaching a bend in the path. An overhanging

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outcrop of rock would, just conceivably, give me a modicum of cover for the one vital moment I needed—

Too late.

As we reached the bend a young boy stepped from behind the outcrop. He had obviously been covering us all the way along. He also carried a shotgun. He also aimed it waist-high. He looked inquiringly at the man behind me, and evidently received an answering sign to keep quiet. He fell into a flank and we continued on our way. My only chance had died stillborn.

The next bend in the path brought us to a small, cup-shaped valley in the side of the hill. It was no more than a hundred yards long and about half that in width. I looked round as we entered and, miserable though I felt, I could not fail to appreciate its excellence as a hideout.

There was no way into it at all save by the watercourse up which I had come, and one man with a rifle could have held that as long as his ammunition lasted. It was guarded on all other sides by a virtually unclimbable palisade of sheer rock. It could not be overlooked by anything except a low-flying aircraft, and even from that there was cover in the form of overhanging rocks.

I started to cross the open ground, but a jab in the back from the man's gun muzzle directed my steps to the right, and the three of us walked round under the overhang. They evidently weren't fools enough to allow footpaths across the goat pasture.

Halfway round there was a cave—a cave that showed signs of long habitation. The entrance was low, a mere four feet high, but it opened up once one had crossed the threshold. There was a rough pallet bed there, and a crudely-carpentered table; goat hams and local wicker-covered cheeses hung round the walls. In the centre, a smokeless charcoal fire glowed in a copper brazier. A sheepskin robe covered the entrance to what seemed to be a further cave. Nearby I could hear the murmur of a small stream.

Yes, this place seemed to have everything, but I still didn't like it.

The man signed to the boy who immediately moved to one side where he could keep me covered without the former masking his fire. It was the sort of thing that Finnessy and Tony taught.

The man then subjected me to as expert a frisking as I've ever had. He got the lot—map, compressed rations, prismatic compass, gun, and extra clips of ammunition—in one series of deft pats over my person. Then he signed to me to sit down, and the boy hauled off my rawhide boots, and got my wad of currency. Even then they were still suspicious, because they stripped me to the buff and went over my clothes with a toothcomb.

These two were no hillbillies. They had been taught. But by whom? There was a touch of Teutonic thoroughness about the whole routine that I didn't like one little bit.

The man tossed my clothes back to me when he was satisfied, and I resumed them and the pathetic remnants of my dignity as fast as my fumbling fingers would allow. The boy was examining my late possessions with interest. He removed the magazine of my

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pistol, extracted the round in the breech, and took the ammunition behind the sheepskin curtain. Then he returned and looked at the map.

The prismatic compass interested him not a little, until he turned to the compressed rations and found the small packets of concentrated coffee. He sniffed one of them, and his nostrils flared. The man grunted, and the boy put it down with marked reluctance.

The silence was getting on my nerves, but I was determined not to be the first to break it. My Serbo-Croat was adequate and fluent but I knew it was Britannic in the extreme. I did not want to hand them my nationality on a plate until I knew more of the form.

I was unarmed and harmless: they allowed me to sit, and the boy took over sentry duties. He sat across the opposite side of the cave from me, gun at the ready, his dark, watchful eyes following my every move. He was a handsome youngster in a rather effeminate way—but, effeminate or not, whoever had taught him his brigandage had had a ready pupil. If I'd tried to start anything he'd have blasted me, and I knew it.

The man then went over my possessions, studying each article with the minutest care. He produced a grubby piece of paper and the stub of a pencil from the rock shelf behind him and seemed to be making an inventory of everything. Who for, I wondered?

After a time he passed the list to the boy who glanced at it for a moment or so, and then passed it back. That rather puzzled me because people of this type in those parts are far more likely to be illiterate than not. The boy got down one of the goat hams. He pulled a wicked-looking knife from his boot, and hacked off a chunk. Then he tore the end off a black loaf and spread it with semi-liquid cheese from one of the wicker baskets. Finally he filled an enamel mug with water from an earthenware pitcher, and put the lot down before me.

I had already nibbled at my compressed rations. They are sustaining but not filling. I was glad of the food, therefore. Things never look so black on a full stomach—and eating gave me time to think. If only one of them would speak!

I finished the food, belched politely as is the custom, and nodded my thanks. The man had got some more paper by this time and was writing steadily. The boy had resumed his watchful guard. Once there was a faint tinkle of mule bells in the distance, and they both stiffened.

The man took up his gun and went out of the cave. The boy didn't move, but his vigilance seemed to increase. The man returned after some ten minutes or so and shrugged reassuringly. He then went back to his writing.

Time dragged on. Outside I could see the shadows shortening as the sun climbed to its zenith, and then imperceptibly lengthening as it started its slide down to the west. In the last twenty-four hours, tautened nerves, stage-fright, and pure funk had all combined to keep me tensely wide awake. My nerves were still taut—but outraged nature at last had its way. I started to nod.

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I came to once or twice with a start, and felt as guilty as an old maid caught napping in a train. Once I thought I caught the barest glimmer of a smile from the boy as I jerked into wakefulness. I gave it up at last and slumped back against the cave wall and felt the beautiful, black waves of sleep welling up and enveloping me.

I woke as someone said, "Have some of your own coffee?"

I hadn't the faintest idea where I was. I mumbled, "Thanks awfully," and took the mug that was held under my nose.

I make no excuse. I was new to the game then. The subconscious caution that overrides every instinct and reflex, and which comes only with hard training and bitter experience, was not fully developed. It was my first mission on my own. It could well have been my last. The invitation to coffee and my mumbled thanks were both in English.

The man was looking at me expressionlessly. I tried lamely to cover up with, "In the Name of God," which serves as thanks among Christians and Muslims in those hills, but it was too late.

The boy was laughing—not a snigger—a low, musical belly-laugh. I would have cuffed his ears off, had it not been for that cursed gun. The man coughed disapprovingly and the boy shut up promptly. To cover my chagrin, I sipped the scalding coffee. Then, for want of something better to say and noticing that they weren't having any, I said in English, "Won't you have some, too?"

The boy shook his head. "It's only a very small packet—"

"Enough for three cups at least," I said. "Please do."

"It's very kind of you," said the man, in precise, heavily-accented English, "but we cannot take from our guest."

"Guest?"

"Of course. I am sorry that I have nothing better to offer you than your own coffee, Mr. Feltham—excellent though it smells."

A cold hand gripped the pit of my stomach. Where had I slipped? I swear I had nothing on me in the way of paper, overlooked envelopes, or anything like that. Finnessy had frisked me far too thoroughly. I wondered if I had talked in my sleep.

"I'm afraid I don't understand you—" I began.

"Splitz. Summer vacation of 1938," he smiled. "A party of students from Cambridge. You always had difficulty with your glottal stops."

Then it came to me with a rush. "Doctor Zendoru!" I yelled. "The Balkan Language Institute—"

"You remember me now? You couldn't be expected to recognise me with this—" he gestured to his beard and unkempt hair—"I was almost certain of you from the first, but one learns caution. You're thinner, browner—so many Germans look so English—and of course, those clothes—I wanted to hear you speak in your own natural voice before committing myself. You must forgive Silene her little ruse. It was my idea."

"Silene?"

"My daughter. No—you haven't met. She spent those holidays with English friends—"

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" She was at Cheltenham, wasn't she? I remember her photo in your drawing-room. But where is she—?"

Then, of course, it dawned on me. I turned to the " boy." She had pulled her leather cap off, and her close-cropped black hair dropped around her ears. She shook her head, and laughter danced in her eyes that were neither black nor brown nor yet dark blue, but something between all three. Funny. As a " boy " I hadn't noticed them, except that they were dark. I hadn't noticed anything about her except a grace of movement that had irritated me—and that she was rather dirty, that she held a gun far too firmly, and that she had an ear I would have loved to have clipped hard. She seemed so different now. The most peculiar thing about sex is—sex.

I felt the most unutterable fool and, for no valid reason, angry.

She reached out and took the mug. " Father is being stuffy and all Balkan-genteel—and, anyhow, English people don't appreciate coffee, the poor dears." She drank noisily because it was hot, and her father clucked his disapproval until she passed the mug to him and he could resist it no longer. She laughed as he drank even more noisily, and she wiped her mouth with the back of her hand.

He put the mug down at last, and looked at her sadly.

" Because you live in a cave, my dear, you should not behave like a peasant woman. When I think of the money I have spent on Cheltenham—" He turned to me. " I'm sorry, Mr. Feltham. This war, you know—" He sounded like the vicar apologising for the lack of seed-cake, and she ragged him unmercifully and lit one of my cigarettes.

The first wave of relief that I had felt on recognising him was receding now, and the " don't trust your own grandmother " atmosphere I had moved in for the last few months was reasserting itself. What did I know of this man? A Balkan Doctor of Philology, who specialised in taking English language students in the long vacs before the war. He might be anything; on their side as easily as ours. I would have to play this one cautiously, as it came.

My mind went back to a bit of advice Andreas had once given me. " When in doubt, play the shot-down R.A.F. type. You've pinched the clothes. Your maps and bits and pieces are the normal escape kit you've brought down with you. It won't last long—they'll get you on pilot's technicalities—and anyhow, an airman on the run always keeps his identity discs. It will give you time to think, though." That was it. When the inevitable questions came I would be a ditched P.O. Prune. I'd force-landed twenty miles away two nights ago. I had been making for high ground to get my bearings to the coast.

His voice broke in on my musing. " But you'll be wondering what brings us both to the top of this barren hill, Mr. Feltham . . ." That was it, was it? Jolly me along until he'd gained my confidence. Ask me no questions—tell me all until I reciprocated and opened up. Not bloody likely!

It could have been a pleasant enough evening. Silene went

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through to the cave behind the sheepskin curtain and, as I talked to the Doctor, I could hear her splashing in some sort of bath.

When she came out again, she was another being. She had changed into a red, homespun skirt and a plain white blouse thing. Her cropped but thick, black hair was still damp from her bath and, even as it dried, it broke into tight curls that moulded her skull.

The grime had gone and through the sun-tanned, olive perfection of her skin one could almost follow the coursing of that essence of champagne and sheer vitality that was the blood of Silene. She was at that moment the most beautiful thing I had ever seen.

She drove us from the cave, and as we bathed in the ice-cold, crystal-clear stream and watched the last rays of the sunset staining the mountain-tops a blue-splashed crimson, she set about preparing the evening meal.

The Doctor was finishing his story by now. He had no deeply-rooted political convictions, he told me, only an obstinate liberalism that persisted in his writings, and which had been enough to make him suspect by both sides—the Fascist Grineac and the Communist partisans.

Shooting had been his passion in his younger days, and this tiny, hidden valley had served him as a natural hunting lodge. He had secretly stocked it with a few necessities and had even planted a small vegetable garden among the rocks, shielded from the prying eyes of reconnaissance aircraft by the scrub pines, and from the depredations of the wild goats by a thick, thorn fence. His gun kept them in meat, and he bought other necessities from small farmers he had known long enough to trust. They had left Splitz just before the trap had sprung, and had been here a year.

"The funk-hole, as you would call it," he said.

"How long do you think you can remain here undiscovered?"

He shrugged. "In a mad and changing world, who can answer that? You are the first who has stumbled on it. The track below is little used. I am not, however, lulled into a sense of false security. It could happen at any time. One lives with that knowledge and accepts it. For myself, I do not mind. It is Silene who is my anxiety. She and her kind—the lost generation at this moment—are our only insurance for the future."

"How does she take being cooped up here?"

"In one side of the scales, the natural rebellion of one so young and vital. In the other, her love and loyalty. The latter is the weightier. I take full advantage of it—not entirely because I am a selfish old man, but for the reason I have already given you. I could not keep her always in this cell. I do not try. She has been down to Splitz on more than one occasion."

"Isn't that a rather pointless risk?"

"A risk, but not pointless. There has been a reason for each of her journeys. She has led people through these hills. People like yourself."

Was this a carefully posed question? I decided to put it to the test. "Like myself?"

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"Yes, British agents."

"What makes you think I am a British agent?"

"Aren't you?"

"From the little I know of that peculiar racket, I wouldn't admit it if I was. In actual fact, I was shot down two nights ago."

He glanced at me quickly, then looked away again. I climbed out of the stream and began dressing.

"You are of the Royal Air Force?" he asked.

"That's right," I mumbled as I pulled my shirt over my head.

"And your companions?"

"I haven't said there were any."

"This is outside fighter range from any Allied base. Your aircraft must therefore have been a bomber or, even more likely, a supply-dropper." A tiny warning bell seemed to ring inside the recesses of my skull. The Doctor was clever.

I was grinning broadly as my head emerged from the shirt. "Right on the beam," I said. "You're perfectly correct. You must forgive my caginess. We are taught to say as little as is absolutely necessary if we're on the run. In actual fact, we baled out over an area that must have been twenty miles square—in pitch darkness. We just lost each other."

"Shot down?" he murmured more to himself than to me. "No moon—no German night-fighters in this area. You were unlucky, Mr. Feltham."

I could have kicked myself—but my brain was working faster now. "Ack-ack as we crossed the coast," I told him. "We knew we'd been hit, of course, but we didn't know that the main tank had been holed until we started to falter—"

"The fuel-gauge—?"

"Was still showing more than half full. It had stuck."

He finished dressing and we walked back towards the cave.

"You have asked me to forgive your—caginess," he said. "Please, in turn, forgive my seeming to interrogate you. I do it only as a sample of what you may expect if you are picked up by people who might pass themselves off as friends."

I couldn't help it. "Such as you?" I asked.

"Such as I," he answered gravely. "Your story must have no holes, no inconsistencies, if you're to get through to wherever you're going."

We had reached the cave now. Silene had hung another sheepskin robe over the outer entrance in our absence and had lit two tallow lamps. The placed looked warm and safe.

For a moment I was overwhelmed with a desire to take these people at their own face-value—to tell this quiet, gravely-spoken, old man of my mission—to ask his advice and help.

I fought it down and knew again the appalling, devastating sense of loneliness that this work can bring to a man. My problem was to get away now that darkness had fallen and to push on to Achilles' valley—to arrive there before first light, and then to puzzle out my next move.

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The meal was ready now—a spicy goulash that had needed only warming up. We sat round the rough table and ate with spoons from wooden bowls. Then Silene brewed the rest of my coffee. We talked of that summer I had spent out here, and she told us of her holiday on the Northumberland moors, of Cambridge, of Cheltenham, of *Gone With the Wind*, of strawberries, and of grouse-shooting. Of everything, in fact, but the war, which made the wrench back to reality the harder when at last I stood up and said I must be pushing on.

I saw the quick, inquiring glance Silene shot at her father and his answering, non-committal shrug.

She turned to me. "Where are you going?" she asked.

I was ready for this. "To the coast," I told her.

"What part of the coast?"

"I'm sorry—I'm not at liberty to tell you that."

She gestured impatiently. "I know that you can't tell me of your next station along the underground. I'm not a novice, you know. I merely want to help. A map and compass are no use at night if you can't see landmarks. Let me put you on the road."

I shook my head, feeling a churlish, ungrateful boor.

"I can manage," I told her. She got angry.

"You idiot!" she flashed. "You couldn't do it even in daylight. You were heading inland when we found you."

"I was making for high ground to get my bearings."

"It is not a matter of bearings—it's one of instinct, knowledge. How far do you think you'll get in the dark before you fall into a ravine, come to an unclimbable rockface, run into a patrol?"

"Mr. Feltham must do as he thinks best, my dear," interposed her father gently.

"Mr. Feltham is a fool," she retorted.

"Then I'll rely on fool's luck," I said. "May I have my things, please?" The Doctor picked up my map, compass, and compressed rations, and then spread them on the table for me to check.

Without a word, Silene went through to the inner cave. She returned with my pistol and spare clips.

I reloaded and then thrust the gun back into my shoulder holster. I was acutely conscious of their gaze. Were they, I wondered, as suspicious of me as I was of them? Was I really suspicious? I didn't know. My every instinct was to trust them. My training, short though it had been, dictated otherwise.

I walked round the table to the Doctor, my hand outstretched. "I'm sorry, sir. It is as you said—I must do as I think best."

"A man must always do that," he answered quietly. "God bless you, my boy." He squeezed my hand in a firm and sinewy grip.

I turned to Silene. "Good-bye—and thank you. Some day when this nonsense is over we'll meet again."

"Let me come," she begged, "just part of the way—the worst part." I shook my head. Then I raised her rough, firm little paw to my lips. It was the first time I had ever kissed a woman's hand,

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but it seemed the natural thing to do. I went then, turning once to look back as I lifted the curtain at the cave mouth.

I shall carry that picture of her always. The dim tallow lamps seemed only to make her the more luminous. Anger had gone then, and in those dark eyes was a look of ineffable sadness. The presence of her father notwithstanding, I wanted most desperately to go back and take her in my arms.

I went, instead, out into the darkness, and my stumbling footsteps found the path I had come up just a few short hours ago to meet this strange girl I seemed to have known all my life.

I had worked out my plan. I would return to the lower path to the spot where we had been picked up by the German patrol. If I turned left at the bottom of the watercourse and kept on, I should be on familiar ground. There was a fork some three miles up. I had to take the right one.

I looked at the luminous dial of my wristwatch. Nearly midnight. Ten miles—just on three hours with luck—then I'd leave the path and strike upwards across country. According to the map another two miles or so should bring me on to the high ground above the valley. What then? I shrugged under my sheepskin jacket.

My rawhide boots made almost no noise on the hard-beaten track, and very soon my eyes became accustomed to the dark. The rest, the food and, above all, the bathe in that icy pool had put new life into me. I had got the hang of the flat-footed, mile-eating clop-clop the boots called for and, although the path lay steadily upwards, I made good time without tiring.

I had a little difficulty at the fork of the paths, and it was only when I found that I had been going downhill for some time that I realised I had missed the junction. I cursed softly and turned to retrace my steps—and my heart stood still. The faintest sound travels far on the night air at that altitude. Back in the distance somebody was moving along the path towards me. Somebody was following me . . .

The path here was narrow, a bare three feet. Like all those tracks that cling to the face of the mountains, it was sheer cliff on one side and equally sheer drop on the other. I had the choice of standing my ground and getting in the first blow when the follower came up to me, always assuming that he didn't get it in first—or of keeping going in the same direction until I came to a wider part of some fold-back on the wall side that would give me a chance to duck into cover until he had gone past.

I listened for a split second to try to estimate the distance he was behind me. I couldn't hear a thing now but the distant babble of the stream in the valley below and the faint sough of the wind above. I couldn't see anything either, as the path curved behind me, but I knew I had not been mistaken. I decided on the latter course, and turned back downhill, not daring to run for fear of the noise, but lifting up those boots and laying them down in a swift, shambling walk to which sheer fright lent mercurial wings.

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I went on for a good quarter-mile until, just as my tautened nerves could take it no longer and I had decided to stop and face whoever it was, I came to the porter's post—one of the built-up plinths about three feet high set at intervals along these paths for porters to rest their loads on. At least it was some sort of cover.

I squeezed in between it and the cliff wall, balling my six-feet up into a compass that the lady who is sawn in two would have envied. Nose between knees, I breathed like a hibernating field-mouse although my tortured lungs were demanding air.

I waited and waited—and then came the inevitable conviction that my ears had been playing tricks, like those of a recruit on sentry-go for the first time. My cramped position was giving me hell, but I had managed to drag my Balkan knife from my boot. I held it, point upwards, in what Tony would have called, "Number one gut-ripper position." If there *was* somebody on my tail and he hesitated the barest fraction of a second at my position, he was for it. I don't know how long I crouched there—perhaps a minute, perhaps five—it seemed an age.

I was about to count thirty, and then get up, and call myself a bloody fool. I had, in fact, counted to twenty-five, when I heard again the clop-clop of his boots—close now and coming fast. He came round the last bend, momentarily blotting out the stars. His sheepskin coat actually brushed my face, and then he had passed me and was gone. I was almost sick with relief.

I waited a further ten minutes or so to make sure that he was well out of earshot before I moved. Then I wriggled out, and went back on all fours until I had turned the bend. I went like the wind after that, wondering how long it would be before he realised that I had given him the slip and doubled back.

I came to the fork much sooner than I expected, and this time turned up the correct track. I was in a quandary now. Would it be better to find cover and wait to see if he came back, or to press on to my objective? Here, in the open space at the junction, the former seemed the better course. A jump out from behind a rock, one quick upward thrust and over the edge he'd go—and I'd be able to proceed without the nerve-racking feeling that I was being followed. I had to rest, anyhow, as that last bit uphill had just about creased me. Again I decided on the childish method of counting. If he didn't appear before I'd counted two hundred he was still bashing doggedly on his way, in which case I'd go on mine.

Who was he? Just an innocent wayfarer on his lawful occasions?

No, his gait had been too purposeful for that. He was on my tail all right. But where had he picked me up? How did he know I should be on the road, anyhow?

With a cold, hard feeling inside me I realised that there could be only one logical explanation. A tip-off from Zendoru and the girl. A tip-off like the Achilles original one to the German patrol. But why? They had had me at their mercy. Obviously because they wanted to know who I really was—where I was going. The shot-down pilot story just hadn't bluffed them.

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But who could they have tipped off—and how?

There was an answer to that one, too. I had been at the stream with the old man for a good twenty minutes. Quite long enough for a smart lass who perhaps had a wireless in her boudoir—and a convenient stream to drown the whine of the transmitter.

What were they? Grineac? Partisan? What the hell did it matter? A rose by any other name was just as fetid. Thank God, I hadn't gone soft and talked! Andreas, Finnessy—they were right. He lived longest who talked least in this game. Yes, that was it. She'd tipped somebody off.

I had counted up to three hundred by the time I had worked this out. He hadn't come back. I was savagely sorry.

I got up. Nothing came to my straining ears, but the sound of the stream and the wind, so I went on my way up the path. Nice people. Nice racket. It stank. Both sides. Ours as well.

All right, Feltham. Put it down to experience; valuable experience. Play it their way—the way of the experts. There was no room for amateurs in this business. Not amateurs who went ga-ga over a pair of eyes that changed from brown to black, and then to the colour of the night sky above me. I cleared my throat, good, hearty, and Port-Said-wise, and spat. I felt better.

I went wrong when I left the path.

According to the map I should have gone down a gentle slope through scrub pine and thorn bush to a stream at the bottom, through the stream, and up a steeper slope the other side.

The scrub pine was there all right, and the thorn, but I missed the stream, which was a pity because I was desperately thirsty by this time. The opposite slope was there also, but at the top of it was an unclimbable cliff that certainly wasn't shown on the map.

I missed the path, naturally. I missed everything except the fact that I was lost.

I came to a stream but it was running the wrong way. That didn't affect its drinking properties, however, and I sat back on my heels on the bank feeling a great deal better. There was nothing for it but to go to ground somewhere until it was light enough to see where the devil I was. That meant getting up higher, away from the stream.

That was a point that Andreas had always stressed. "If you're lost at night, don't blunder around blindly. Get on to high ground, into cover, and conserve your energy until it's light enough to see the surrounding country and compare it with your map. Never be caught in a valley near water. People bring cattle to drink there. People with cattle often have dogs and, in spite of your clothes, you smell different from the locals. Dogs are inquisitive of strange smells. Dogs bark."

I walked away at right angles from the stream up what the map would, no doubt, describe as yet another "gentle slope." My legs were calling it something else. I was pretty well flogged by this time.

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Ten half-drugged, stumbling yards and I came up against a stone wall—then somebody coughed.

I remember wondering dully how many major shocks the system could take in twenty-four hours. I froze against the rough stonework, and realised that it was only breast-high, and that the cougher was just the other side. Hardly daring to breathe, I looked downwards and made out in the darkness an even blacker mass.

There was a gentle snore then, and the mass stirred uneasily. It was a man wrapped in a blanket. Behind me the sky was lightening perceptibly—enough, in fact, to enable me to see the dim outlines of a building the other side of the stone wall, and another just beyond it. I tiptoed gently away from the wall cursing the unknown cartographer in heaps. Farms were supposed to be shown on the damned map, but there were none, according to it, nearer than twenty miles on the south side of the track except the one in Achilles' valley—

Then it hit me like a flash. This *was* Achilles' valley. *I* was at fault. I had blundered right over the ridge into it.

There was only one thing to be done. Get up the slope and into cover—and quick.

Dawn was coming fast now and I was able to move away with some speed without thrashing around too much.

I climbed steadily until I came to a clump of pine trees growing almost horizontally out of the cliff.

I lay belly-down among the pine needles and studied the movement of the human ants below me. The entrance to the valley lay away to my right. There seemed to be a guard post there. There were also pickets on the hills all round because I could see a straggling line of reliefs going out and others coming in. I must have entered between two of them. There was a buzz of activity.

A file of grey-clad figures entered from the gap near the path and marched towards the biggest of the buildings. It was the place where Andreas and I had had our interview with Achilles. Two of them went into the building and the rest relaxed on the ground outside. Later, someone was brought from the house that I'd first stumbled against and was hustled quickly across to the bigger building. I could have brought field-glasses with me, but I had chosen not to on the score of weight and difficulty of jettisoning. I would have given a lot for them now.

I lay and studied every movement—and the sun climbed steadily upwards to the meridian and then commenced its downward path. There were a lot of comings and goings. Once a mule-mounted cavalcade arrived, and I was certain that I recognised the straight back of Achilles among them. Later on, the grey-clad file of men departed, and the man who had been taken out of the first house returned. He needed assistance now.

Was it Andreas? It was impossible to tell at this distance.

Obviously the only thing to do was to sweat it out here, and then to go down after dark and snoop around. If the cougher was a criterion of their guarding standards it should not be too difficult.

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Achilles, if it was he, departed with his bodyguard, and the place seemed to settle down into a siesta. I drank my fill from the spring, munched some more of my compressed rations, and settled down myself. I even slept. There seemed little else to do.

Dusk was falling when I woke. Cooking fires were aglow and there seemed to be more activity among the guards and pickets. Men were coming in from the surrounding hills and others were going out. I checked and rechecked my route in from the map and on the ground, and I felt that I would be able to cope better on the outward journey now that I had established my position.

Time had gone surprisingly quickly during the day when there was activity to observe, but now the evening dragged by on leaden feet. Midnight would be the time, I decided. The alleged guards would be safely snugged down in their blankets then. I would start with the first building—the one that the man had been brought out of and then returned to.

Was it Andreas? I asked myself again. If only he had been walking freely I might have been able to judge. He hadn't been walking freely, though. He had been hustled across on the outward journey. He had been half carried on the way back.

It was a crawling age before both hands of my watch pointed to twelve. It was darker than it had been last night and, to add to the general depression of things, a steady drizzle was falling. I moved out of my hiding-place and crept down the hill. In a quarter of an hour I was back at the low stone wall.

This guard was easier to fix than the cougher. He was a trumpeter. His snores reverberated yards before I came to the wall.

I skirted round the building. It had two doors, each of heavy rough-cut timber and each secured by an enormous padlock. It was squatly built and I found that I could reach up to the eaves without stretching. The guard was sleeping on the doorward side. I felt my way round to the other, my fingers exploring the rough stonework. At the back were two heavily-barred windows.

I listened at the first window, but could hear nothing above the steady pelting of the rain and the snores of the guard the other side. At the second, I seemed to hear a rustle as if someone was stirring uneasily on a bed. This was a calculated risk I had to take if I was to discover the identity of the prisoner.

I drew myself up to the window. "Andreas," I whispered urgently, "Andreas."

"Va dis?" came the answer, and I breathed again. It was his voice all right, recognisable even in a whisper.

"Stavro."

"Bloody good show," he said in English, with as much emotion as if I'd told him there were kippers for breakfast. "I've got quite a lot of stuff for you to take back. I'll have to talk fast. How's the guard situation?"

"Asleep the other side—rolled in a blanket. But the idea was that I should get you out of here—"

"I wouldn't make it. They've given me a pretty good going

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over." I realised then how weak and terribly tired his voice was.

"We could still have a shot at it," I said.

"Nothing doing, I'm afraid. My feet are in a hell of a state."

"So were mine last time—but we did it."

"This is different. Sorry, Stavro. I don't turn belly-up easily, but I know when I'm against a brick wall. Can you hear me?"

"Yes—but can't you come to the window?"

"I'm spreadeagled to this damned bed—wrists and ankles. Now, listen. Tell Bill that Achilles is—"

I rebelled then in a quick upsurge of anger that drowned fear. "I'm not going to listen. My orders were clear. I've got to have a shot at getting you out. Does the guard hold the keys?"

"Don't be a bloody fool. Listen to what I say—"

I said a rude word and left the window, loosening my pistol in the shoulder holster. If the sleeping beauty held the keys, he'd hand them over. If he didn't, he would tell me who did. Then I paused. What would I do if he struck out—or yelled? Shoot him and bring the whole camp round my ears?

I returned the pistol and pulled the knife from my boot. Let's see how good a teacher Tony had been. I was angry all right—but with a cold, steadying sort of anger. For the first time this mission, I knew just what I was going to do.

He didn't stir when I sank down on one knee beside him, but he wriggled violently when I grabbed a handful of blanket with my left hand and stuffed it down over his nose and mouth, hard and savagely. He stopped when he felt the point of the knife pricking the soft part immediately below the angle of his jaw, and I saw the whites of his eyes in the darkness.

"The keys, swineface," I demanded in the local dialect. He shook his head under my pressing hand—not in a bold gesture of defiance by any means. Fear has an aura, they say. This fellow was in a miasma. I loosened the blanket slightly.

"I don't hold them—on the honour of my mother," he babbled in a strangled whisper.

"Who does?" I pressed on the knife, very slightly.

"Feodl—in the guardroom."

"Where is the guardroom?" I pressed harder. If I'd given him a pencil and paper he'd have drawn me a map. All he wanted was for me to take that knife away, and he was too frightened to lie.

"The hut the other side of this one. The door is locked from the inside. Feodl sleeps there—"

"Alone?" He nodded.

"And your name?"

"Igor—"

"Good-bye, Igor," I said, and pushed firmly. Tony was right. It was noiseless except for a slight gurgle.

I rose and padded round to the other hut. It was smaller than the cell block, and I noticed a dim light through a chink in the door planks. From the inside came the sound of stentorian snoring. They had easy consciences, these types—or none.

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I tapped softly and insistently, and after a time the snoring stopped. " Va dis? " a sleepy voice asked.

" Igor," I answered in a hoarse mutter which I hoped to God would pass muster with a sleepy man as the voice of his late comrade. " Open up—quiet—quiet."

It did pass muster. I heard him stumbling about and murmuring imprecations and then the door opened. I was through it in a split second, and had my pistol jammed in his belly and the door kicked shut behind me before he realised what had happened.

He was an oldish and rather stupid-looking man and I was glad that I did not have to kill him.

As he opened his mouth to yell I kicked him in the crutch, and as he came forward, doubled in agony, smacked the pistol butt down on his skull. That would hold him till morning at least.

I stepped over him and looked round the hut. There were no complications. A large ring with five keys on it lay on the table beside the lamp. I grabbed them, blew out the lamp, and darted back to the cell block.

The third key fitted, and I pushed the creaking door open. Andreas had said he was spreadeagled. He was right. Each wrist and each ankle was tightly tied to one of the bed-posts, and I had a hell of a job sawing through the tough cords in the darkness without cutting him. The circulation had almost stopped, and I heard his quick intake of breath as I got him upright and the blood started flowing again.

" I've no boots—couldn't wear them if I had," he muttered. " They concentrated on my feet."

They had. I felt them in the darkness, and my stomach turned. They were a wet and sticky mess. Well, so were mine last time. Boots—that was the problem. Then, I thought of Igor. He wouldn't be requiring his any more.

I went out and dragged them off him—and the wrappings that went with them. Those mountain boots were all pretty much of a size—you fitted them by the amount of wrappings you used.

Andreas was sitting on the side of the bed swaying slightly when I returned. I knelt down in front of him and wound the wrappings on. Then we pulled the boots on between us. He stood up then, and I almost felt the pain in my own feet as he bit back a groan.

I said, " Come on, for God's sake. Mine were worse than that. I'll get you a bloody donkey when we are out of here—and your arse will be worse than your feet when we get to the coast." I had to say something footling—or cry. I had to make him walk on those feet.

I remembered then the bottle of slivovitch I had seen on the guardroom table, and I left him propped against the door-post while I went back for it.

Feodl was just where he had fallen. I manhandled him under the bed and draped the blankets round him. Nobody would find him there unless they were looking for him. I grabbed the bottle, pulled the door to, and went back to Andreas.

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The cool night air seemed to have revived him because he was standing upright trying his weight tentatively on each foot alternately. I shoved the bottle into his hands and then, as an idea struck me, returned to the defunct Igor.

I hefted him up on to my shoulder, took him back to the cell, and dumped him down on the bed in Andreas' place. I tied the ropes roughly round his wrists and ankles and pulled until I had him trussed as Andreas had been—then I covered him with a blanket, and we went out and relocked the door.

With any luck, judging from the haphazard way they had seemed to run their guard reliefs, that double subterfuge ought to gain us quite a bit of precious time.

Andreas stuck the first two hundred yards better than I had dared hope. We climbed the wall, waded through the stream, and started along the path by which I had come in—one of his arms round my shoulders—one of mine round his waist. He had to stop for a moment then, though—and again after the next two hundred. He stuck it doggedly but we were making pitifully slow progress.

I plied him with slivovitch until he would take no more. Then, on an impulse, I tipped the rest down each of his boot-tops. It would sting like hell but might stop his feet from suppurating until I could give them proper attention. It seemed to do the trick for a while. He cursed me in a rich stream which did my heart good, and we plodded on.

I'm not going to dwell on the rest of that night. There were times when he became completely delirious and I had to slug him hard to prevent his singing and yelling. There were other times when he was rational, and told me in choking gasps of what had happened during the few preceding days—and what I had to tell Bill on my return, because he was convinced he'd never make it. There were other times when he faded completely out, and I had to get him over my shoulder and carry him until he came to again.

We made it, though. As dawn was breaking we came to the watercourse that led up to the doctor's valley.

It was the only hole I could make for and I knew what I was going to do. Andreas had to get out. I had to take him out. Nothing else mattered. I was going to return there—smiling and unsuspicious—and then, without a moment's compunction, shoot them both before either of them had a chance to summon the vultures. I'd get through then on the wireless I'd rehidden in the valley. Tell Cairo in the standard code what had happened and arrange another pick-up when Andreas was fit to travel.

I hoped I might be able to do it when she wasn't looking at me—when she wasn't standing in dim lamplight in a red skirt and a white blouse—and her drying hair wasn't curling round the perfect oval of her face—and those eyes weren't—

I smacked Andreas hard across the mouth to bring him round and started to manhandle him up the watercourse—and, like Job, I cursed the day I was born . . .

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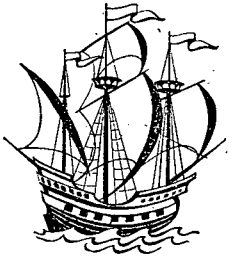

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The Doctor had rigged up a simple but very ingenious trip wire from an unavoidable shrub halfway up the watercourse. It rattled a tin in the cave, and it was that which had warned them of my approach on the previous occasion. They had told me then that, if I came this way again, I was to give the wire three distinct tugs, pause, and then tug again three times.

Andreas passed out completely, and I had to drag him, a foot at a time, up the last almost perpendicular bit of the watercourse. I left him wedged against a spur of rock and scrabbled about among the roots until I found the wire. I tugged as they had told me, and waited. I waited a long time—minutes. Then, even more decisively, I signalled again and again, but there was no response so I decided to go on alone, and I crawled on my belly with my pistol cocked.

There wasn't a sign of life in the tiny valley. I was worried. The two of them never left the cave at the same time, so they had told me. Hugging the cliff face, I crept round to the entrance of the cave and peered in through the curtain. Faint smoke came from the charcoal brazier, but that was all.

I crossed to the inner curtain—nobody there either. I searched the valley from end to end—the stream, the garden under the pines, the goat-pen. No—they'd flown the coop all right. The question was, when would they return? It was no use standing there wondering. I had to do something about Andreas unless I wanted a dead man on my hands. I went back and got him, carrying him into the cave over my shoulder, and I lowered him down on to the bed behind the second curtain—her bed.

I blew the charcoal embers up and put some water on to boil. Then I rummaged through the rock shelves until I found a bundle of clean lint and a jar of aromatic balsam that smelt like the stuff that Chrios' people had put on my feet. He didn't even moan as I got his clothes and boots off. He was in a hell of a state. Burns, weals, and welts covered him from shoulders to heels. His feet were the worst, though. I shudder now as I think of them.

I bathed him with warm water, smothered him in the balsam and, finally, swathed him in two of the Doctor's clean shirts. He came round for a few moments as I warmed up soup that I'd found in a pot. I managed to get him to swallow a good half pint, and when he went off again it was in more of a natural sleep than the previous exhausted coma. I was pretty well done in myself by this time. I nodded off two or three times as I wolfed some soup and black bread, coming to each time with an uneasy start. Their absence complicated matters. We both needed sleep above all things, but I should have to stay awake on guard . . .

Nature took charge at this point. I don't remember crossing to the other pallet in the outer cave. All I know is that it was pitch dark when I woke. I had packed away some ten hours of solid, dreamless sleep. Inexcusable—but I felt a new man, albeit a very guilty one, as I swung my feet to the floor.

Andreas was breathing steadily and easily in the other cave.

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I stumbled around until I found a tallow lamp, lit it, and pegged down the curtain over the cave mouth. The charcoal fire had gone out and I had some difficulty in getting it going again. I managed it in the end and started to prepare a gargantuan meal of goat meat and onions. A change in the even note of Andreas' breathing took me across to the inner cave. He was awake.

"Usual question," he said as I entered. "Where the hell am I?"

"Safe as houses—or caves if you like it better—"

"How did we get here? Last thing I remember was arguing with you through the window."

"I'll tell you everything later. I'm getting some grub under way at the moment. How do you feel?"

"Bit stiff, and damned hungry."

He had the recuperative powers of the devil. When I went back with two steaming bowls, he was sitting up and he'd unwrapped his bandages and was examining his feet critically. Three times I went out and refilled the bowls before, replete and slightly glazed, we sat and smoked Albanian cigarettes. I gave him the briefest outline of events since I had dropped in three nights ago.

"Zendoru?" he said musingly. "Damned interesting, that. So we're in his little den, are we?"

"What do you know about him?" I asked.

"Very little. He has helped more than one Britisher out. That could mean anything, of course. He could still be working for the other side at the same time. Balkan politics are a crazy patchwork in peacetime, but now that this major conflict has been superimposed on them they are more mixed up than ever. You were followed from here, were you? That, again, could mean anything, or nothing."

"They lied to me," I said.

"Lies are the normal currency of this business. But why are you so certain?"

"They said that they were lone wolves—that nobody knew of the existence of this place besides themselves—yet, on leaving it, I find myself followed. They must have tipped somebody off."

"But how?"

"Wireless, I thought. Probably from a set hidden in here."

I got up and poked around the cave. There was an offshoot from it in the far corner, just a narrow cleft no more than eighteen inches wide. I went out and lit a second tallow lamp, then returned and pushed through the narrow gap.

It opened up, after about six feet, into a wider passage. I walked on a few paces until I came up against a blank wall. There was a draught of cold air above me and, looking up, I saw the stars through a hole no more than a foot square. Underneath it was a large wooden box with a wire-netting mesh in front of it. Above the mesh was a wooden trap and, as I put the lamp near it to examine it, there was a rustle and a sleepy, indignant coo from inside. Two pigeons blinked at me from a wooden perch. One moved as I looked, and I saw the glint of a metal container attached to its leg.

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I put my hand inside and took them out in turn. The containers were both empty.

So that was it. As quick almost, but quieter and safer than wireless. I turned and retraced my steps, and even as I squeezed through the gap the tin rang in the outer cave.

I signalled to Andreas for silence and doused both lamps. As I got to the outer curtain I could hear footsteps approaching. There seemed to be only one set and they were advancing confidently and without caution. I slid back the jacket of my pistol.

The curtain was lifted, a figure entered, and Silene said inquiringly, " Father? Father? "

I said, " Good evening, Miss Zendoru."

I heard her quick intake of breath with a certain mordant satisfaction. I'd had the hell scared out of me so often on this trip that it was sadistically satisfying to do it to somebody else.

I went on, " There's a lamp on the table in front of you. Suppose you light it. I wouldn't do anything rash, though—you're covered by more than one pistol." That wasn't exactly accurate, but I remembered that vicious shotgun she was carrying last time.

A match glowed in the darkness and, as the light took up and caught the wick, she looked round at me. She was dressed in men's clothes, as she had been when I first saw her. She blinked as her eyes grew accustomed to the light. She stared for a moment unbelievingly. " I—I don't understand—"

" No? Well, suppose you turn round while I see if you're carrying concealed offensive weapons? " She did so, and I ran my hands over her and felt her flinch with distaste. She had a 7 mm. Biretta and a short, but very sharp knife on her. I slipped them into my side pocket, and she turned and faced me.

" Where is my father? " she asked.

" Feeding the pigeons," I told her between clenched teeth, and she glanced quickly towards the inner cave.

Andreas came out then, pussyfooting tenderly on his rebandaged feet. He bowed to her gravely. She sat down suddenly on the pallet behind her, and I noticed how desperately tired she looked, and that she had a livid weal down one side of her face.

" What fools we were not to have killed you when we had the chance," she said dully. " I would have done so—but you hoodwinked my father."

" He took me for one of the true-blue Herrenvolk, did he? "

She looked puzzled, then shrugged. " He took you for what you are not," she said. Then asked again, " Where is he? What have you done with him? " She was near to tears. I prayed inwardly that she wouldn't break down. It was bad enough as it was.

I said, " I'm asking the questions. Where's the end of that pigeon line you have back there? Where do they fly to? "

We had been speaking in English till then, but now she lapsed back into the local dialect—just one word that her grave, pedantic father hadn't taught either of us. A very rude word. Andreas

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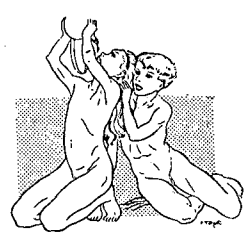

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chuckled. He hobbled round beside her, and suddenly clamped her head under his arm, took her lower jaw in his other hand, and forced her mouth open. He thrust his finger in. I didn't realise what he was doing and felt a wave of nausea almost overwhelm me.

She struggled, and bit him viciously, and I heard him swear. I was prepared to shoot her, if necessary, but this was something they hadn't taught me at the school—how to see a woman manhandled with equanimity. It came to me what he was doing. He was searching her mouth for a poison capsule. He didn't find one.

He said, " You may be carrying it somewhere else. We'll tie your hands, if you don't mind." He took his belt off, pulled her to her feet, spun her round, and fastened her hands securely behind her. He searched her—comprehensively. She struggled at first but then, realising the futility of it, submitted, and I stood and sweated, hating Andreas, myself, and her for making this necessary. She slumped on the pallet at the end of it, and he at least had the grace to release her hands again to allow her to resume what clothes he had removed.

She didn't utter a sound throughout, but I saw the two large tears that rolled down her grimy cheeks before she knuckled them away savagely. She keeled over then in a heap, and Andreas looked down at her, and said, " Poor little bitch. Sorry about all this, Stavro; but women are inclined to be a bit quick on the capsule if they've got one."

I said, " Do you have to be so bloody objective about it all? "

He looked at me quickly, and shrugged. " Better outrage her dignity than risk her swallowing a couple of grammes of cyanide needlessly. Get her some water. And then heat up some of that soup if there is any."

He hobbled across to a chair and sat down heavily, and I realised his feet must be giving him hell—and I was glad. I got her stretched out on the pallet, raised her head, and gave her a little water. She opened her eyes. They wandered for a moment, then caught mine and blazed hate.

I got up, blew the charcoal into life, and heated the remains of the soup. She was lying still, looking fixedly up at the roof of the cave, when I came back. I put the bowl beside her. She didn't move.

I said, " Try to eat. You'll feel better." She turned her head away and muttered something in German.

Andreas said, " Keep it in English—or Serb."

" Where is my father? " she asked again, in English.

I looked helplessly at Andreas. He nodded to me.

" We don't know," I told her. " The place was deserted when we arrived this morning. That is the truth—"

" Why should I believe you? " she asked contemptuously.

" Please yourself," I answered. " That soup is getting cold."

I saw her nostrils flare as pride battled with hunger. Hunger won. She took the bowl and spoon and tackled it wolfishly. Andreas and I sat and smoked as she ate. I filled her bowl a second time, and as I did I noticed the remains of my coffee in its tinfoil

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packet on a rock shelf. I boiled a mug of water on the now red-hot charcoal and tipped the coffee in, pouring it into another mug and back again, as I had seen her make it. I put the mug down beside her. She looked at it for some time, and then could resist no longer. She drank it, scalding as it was, quickly and gratefully. It seemed to release some floodgate within her because she began to cry—softly at first, then in great sobs that racked my guts.

I sat down beside her and put my arm across her shoulders. She shrugged it off.

"On my honour," I said, "we've told you the truth."

"How can I believe that," she asked, "when you behave as you have done? What did we do to you except try to help you?"

I looked at Andreas again. He nodded another go-ahead signal.

"Well, why did you have me followed when I left here?"

"Have you followed?" she said in amazement. "I followed you, myself. You said you were making for the coast. I watched you go down the watercourse in the darkness, and saw and heard you turn the wrong way—inland. I came back and changed quickly—determined, in spite of your protests, to see you on to the proper road. I followed you as far as the forked pass but you were going fast and I couldn't overtake you—then I lost you."

"Go on," I said earnestly. "Please go on—"

"I turned and came back just as dawn was breaking. I saw a German patrol coming down the path towards me. It was at a sheer drop, but there was nothing else for it. I jumped, hoping to land in a clump of bushes farther down. I missed—and went the whole distance. I struck my head. The patrol couldn't have seen me—these Germans aren't as quick-sighted as our own people.

"I must have lain there for a long time before I regained consciousness. There was a lot of activity on the path above. I waited until dark before climbing back. Then I returned here."

My heart was singing. Lies might have been the currency of our trade—but this was the truth. I knew it. I turned and glared defiantly at Andreas. He could believe what he damned well liked. *I* was satisfied. Surprisingly, he gave me a thumbs-up signal.

I said quietly, "Silene, look at me. I realised I was being followed about a mile or so past the fork. I hid behind a stone post. You passed, but I didn't know it was you. I doubled back then. I had taken the wrong turning, anyhow. I was going to help A—, this man. I assumed it could only have been you who had called up somebody to follow me. I looked for a wireless set when we came back here and found the place deserted. I discovered the pigeons—and thought I had the answer."

"Poor Father's pigeons." She smiled sadly. "He couldn't bear to leave them behind when we came up here. Most of them have died off—" I remembered then the lofts behind the house in Splitz and the Doctor's constant battle against the hawks.

Andreas got up and hobbled to the curtain.

"I'll get my bits and pieces out of here, Miss Zendoru." He

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turned and looked at her. " I'm sorry about the going-over I gave you. You realise I was looking for a possible poison capsule? "

She nodded absently. " But my father—where can he be—? "

Then the tin rattled discordantly.

We all jumped to our feet and I started to say, " Here he is now," but then I remembered that the Doctor would have signalled—three and three again. And there was more than one set of footsteps, and they were pounding through the gap.

I heard a curt command in German: " Spread out, you schweinehund, spread out. There should be a cave."

Andreas was the first to react. He doused both lamps with the flat of his palms.

I remember saying hopelessly, " That's bitched it."

And I heard Silene's urgent whisper in the darkness, " Follow me—quietly—quietly," and her hand grasped mine. I, in turn, grabbed Andreas by the arm, and she led us swiftly behind the inner curtain, across the other cave, and into the recess I had explored when looking for the wireless set.

They had found the entrance to the outer cave by this time and, over my shoulder, I saw electric torches stabbing the darkness. I slipped my hand from Silene's grasp and loosened my pistol in the holster. It would be only a matter of seconds before they stopped thrashing around and falling over tables and beds—and we'd be caught like rats in a trap.

With a modicum of luck, however, I would take a couple with us. We had rounded the corner of the short passage now, and I felt the down draught of cool night air from the hole above the pigeon-cote. Silene scrambled on to a ledge and shoved the cote up through the hole. Behind us there was an avalanche of Teutonic oaths as someone tripped over a bed, and brought the inner curtain down.

We had the general idea of things by this time. Silene stood aside and together we boosted Andreas up and through. She indicated that I should go next, but I took her round the waist and lifted her up after him. As her legs disappeared, I shot after her.

" The rock—help me roll it," she gasped as I emerged. I saw that a large, round boulder was balanced on the edge of the hole through which we had come. Together we heaved and twisted, and the rock settled neatly over the trap.

We were in another watercourse, similar to the one which entered the valley but running the other way and in the opposite direction to the path below. This entered yet another valley. We crossed it at a run—and then Andreas faltered.

He said, " Go on, you two. I've got no boots."

I halted in sheer dismay, but Silene was already whipping off her sheepskin coat. We stretched it tight as I hacked it in two with my knife. Then, in spite of his protests, we wrapped each piece clumsily round his feet and secured them with her scarf and my belt. It was a pitiful enough attempt but it served its purpose for the moment.

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Half dragging him, half supporting him, we got across the second valley and started to climb the almost sheer wall, which cut off the high ground from the two valleys below. Where his hands could help he managed better, and soon we were at the top, gasping and retching with the effort, and peering over the brink to where we could still see their torches as they searched the first valley.

"How long before they discover the backdoor?" I asked.

"With luck, not till morning when they see the chinks of light round it from below," she replied.

They started shooting down there then, and we heard the outraged bleating of goats and, above it all, the long-drawn-out howl of one of themselves.

Silene said, "Will you tell me just where you want to go? It would help if it were the truth."

I said, "Touché," and told her Cap Garde near the lighthouse.

She considered for a time.

"That is about twenty-five miles across the hills," she said at last, and I winced. Every stage of every damned journey I had ever made in this country was in multiples of twenty-five. Andreas and I glanced at each other in the darkness, both no doubt thinking the same thing. Even with boots he would never make it.

I thought of Chrios' village and was about to suggest it when she spoke again. "If we can get him along another four or five miles by daylight, I can leave you both in a safe place and return with a mule tomorrow night."

I didn't question that, just grunted, and got him upright and, with each of his arms across our shoulders, we moved on like Napoleon's retreat from Moscow. He must have been suffering the agonies of the damned but he stuck it grimly, and never so much as a moan passed his lips. Thirst troubled us all badly as there was no water on that high range. We spoke little—I doubt if half a dozen words passed between us for the rest of the night.

She left us in the lee of a tumbled pile of boulders on a bare mountaintop in the early hours. There was a tiny dewpool there and, although it had been fouled by wild goats, it tasted better than Veuve Clicquot. She went off down the slope in the gathering dawn and I marvelled at her sheer vitality. She had been through as rough a time as I over the last twenty-four hours, but there was no droop to those slim, boyish shoulders. Characteristically, she didn't tell us where she was going—just that, with luck, she should be back in about two hours or, failing that, after nightfall.

I draped my jacket round Andreas and got him stretched out tolerably comfortably. Then I sat with my back to the rock and watched the sun climb up over the hills. Andreas slept fitfully at first, then slid into a deeper and more restful slumber. I was glad. He would recruit and husband his vast resources that way. And, if we didn't talk, we couldn't voice the wretched doubt that hovered at the back of my mind. It was a reasonably clear premise that she was anti-German—but what if she sold us out to one of the other inextricably mixed-up factions? We were sitters up here.

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If Andreas had wakened and suggested that, I'd have hit him. Yet here I was, sniffing and sifting through a cesspit of possible treachery . . .

I didn't see her until she was a bare hundred yards below me. She had come up the mountainside like a veteran deerstalker, taking advantage of every scrap of cover. Scarcely two hours had gone by and I hadn't even begun to expect her. She flung herself down beside me, her chest rising and falling under her homespun shirt, and her hair clinging damply round her face. She had come fast. She had a soft leather shepherd's bag with bread, meat, and cheese, together with balsam for Andreas' feet, bandages, and a bottle of slivovitch. It was no light weight.

I sat and watched her as she got her breath back. She looked like a young, slim, and very tired boy. After a while she sat up and smiled at me. "So far so good," she said. "I have tethered the mule below in the valley. If we can get your friend down at nightfall . . ."

"You had no trouble?"

She shook her head. "I didn't expect any. These people are trustworthy—provided they are not too frightened."

"Did you get any news about—?" I nodded back in the direction from which we had come.

"None."

"I should have said it was a carefully prepared raid, though clumsily carried out. Who knew about the cave besides yourselves?"

"You—" Oh God, were we going to start all this again?

I said, "Let's clear the air of that one right away, shall we? If I had wanted to betray you, I could have done it without all this palaver."

"If you'll let me finish—I was going to say you, and one other person, are the only ones in the world who knew about it, besides Father and me."

"Who is the other one?"

"You wouldn't know him. A Greek army officer—at least he was once. He got mixed up in politics and left Greece before the war. He taught Greek for a time in my father's school. He was out shooting with my father once when he fell over a cliff and was injured. Father took him to the cave."

"Would this man have any reason to betray your father?"

She shrugged. "Who knows? Who knows anything these days, when a friend of yesterday may be an enemy tomorrow?"

"Is he—this man—still in the country?"

"I believe so. He, or somebody that answers to his description, leads a band of partisans—"

"His name?"

"George Caranides."

"Have you ever heard of a man calling himself Achilles?"

She nodded. "Of course. If what we have heard is correct, they are one and the same person."

There was a rustle behind us. We turned quickly.

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Andreas was sitting up. "And that," he said ruefully, "is what I got a pair of burnt feet trying to find out. What else do you know of him?"

"Only what I have just said. I have never met him myself. He was with Father for a time while I was in England at school."

He looked thoughtful, and she busied herself unpacking the bag. We ate after that, and re-dressed Andreas' feet. Then I insisted on her resting. She curled up in the shade of the rock like a small, tired animal, and in a moment she was asleep.

Something tugged at my heart as I looked at her. She was so small and helpless lying there—just another unconsidered bit of the war's jetsam. Andreas motioned me to move away a little.

"That about wraps it up," he told me in a low voice. "At least, it would if she were a hundred-per-cent certain. This Caranides is top man on the totem pole in Greek politics at the moment. He fell out with his own people badly before the war, and went to ground. In the present hugger-mugger, he has got back into favour. We have to deal with him in matters of major policy in so far as Greece is affected. Certain of our back-room boys have had their doubts about him for some time past. The Colonel has always had a theory that he was Achilles, but we haven't been able to come out into the open with it because of high-level diplomacy.

"Our first trip in was to try to establish Bill's theory. It strengthened our suspicions but didn't nail it down. I came back again to have another shot—with the result you know—I landed in the cart. I have established, however, that Achilles is pro-Hun. This information the girl has dropped is another link in the chain. If only I could get her father and Achilles together—"

"Got any theories about her father's disappearance?" I asked the question that had been worrying me all night.

"Only a near-intelligent guess. Silene followed you—to put you on the right road. She didn't return in the morning. The old boy stuck it as long as he could and then went out to look for her. I should say he ran into Achilles, or some of his men. Seeing him again reminded Achilles of the hideout he'd visited before the war. He would have passed the tip on to the German patrols."

I mulled over this for a time. It fitted. It fitted like everything else turned on the lathe of Andreas' logical reasoning.

"In that case the Doctor's chances of survival are—" I began.

"Nil," he supplied.

"What about the girl?"

"Take her with us," he said promptly, and a wave of lightness lifted my gloom for a moment.

She must have been near exhaustion because she slept well into the afternoon. She didn't even stir when I lifted her and moved her round into the shade as the sun shifted.

She awoke refreshed, but there was now a look of sadness in her

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lovely eyes that I found well-nigh unendurable. I busied myself hacking up bread and meat, and after we had eaten and the sun had dipped below the hills we set off down into the valley, with Andreas sliding on his behind most of the way to save his feet.

The mule was tethered on a long line that had allowed it to crop the stunted grass on the bank of the small stream. Silene told us she had borrowed it from a charcoal-burner about two miles up the valley—a family they knew and trusted. She groped under a rock and produced a crude saddle, with hooks on it to take pack-straps. It looked damned uncomfortable, but we got Andreas up on top. The rest and food had done wonders but, as I adjusted the rope stirrups to his bulky foot-wrappings and felt him wince slightly, I knew it would be many days before he was fit again.

This ride was not going to be easy, either. Tomorrow would be one of the nights on which the sub would be standing by. We wanted to break the back of the journey tonight and lie up through the day at an easy distance from the beach.

And so we set off. Most of my memories of those two last trips are of walking. The way Silene took us was almost a crow-flight across three parallel ranges. There was a path of sorts, of course. It petered out frequently and I realised that, map notwithstanding, had she not been leading us I, at least, would have been hopelessly lost more than once.

When the sky behind us was greying, we stopped again on a hilltop, among rocks and near a dewpond. These were the spring grazing tracks, she told us, little used at any other time of the year. When it was really light we saw the sea across a two-mile-wide coastal plain that was dotted with small farms. Cap Garde with its white lighthouse lay straight ahead of us. She had brought us out of the hills smack on the beam.

I told her so with warm appreciation, but she advised against jubilation—the worst part was before us.

We watered the mule and tethered it among the rocks with the feed-bag that swung on the saddle. Then, after eating, we again dressed Andreas' feet. I have often wondered why somebody has not commercialised that balsam. It was a wonder-worker, all right. Although far from usable yet, the burnt and lacerated soles were already healing with a rapidity that I would not have thought possible when I first saw them.

Andreas insisted on remaining awake while Silene and I slept. Again she just curled up in the shade and went out like a light. I rolled up my sheepskin jacket and put it under her head, and she didn't move.

The sun was well overhead when I woke, but Silene still slept on. Andreas and I sat and talked in undertones. German motor patrols had gone up and down the road two or three times, he told me, and once an MTB had dashed on a zigzag course down the coast a mile or so offshore, and he had wondered for a time whether they had got wind of a sub. They had gone off then, however, and things had been quiet for the last hour. He yawned

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enormously and stretched out, and in a matter of seconds was asleep, too.

I sat with my back against the rock and looked at Silene. She lay on her side facing me, one arm outstretched towards me, and I had an almost irresistible desire to take those relaxed, curving fingers in mine.

Almost as if my thoughts had pierced the barrier of sleep, she suddenly stirred and sat up. I did put out my hand then and she took it, but only to pull herself to her feet. She wandered off and came back after a time with an armful of the long, grey, lichen moss that Balkan mules, in the unaccountable way of that wonderful animal, seem to relish and even to thrive on. She threw it down in front of him, and then bent to examine his hoofs.

Furious with myself that I had left this simple chore to her, I got up and went over to make some pretence of helping. She looked away sharply as I came up to her, and I saw she was crying.

I took her in my arms and she just hung there. She didn't sob —she didn't make a sound. It would have been easier to bear if she had. I wanted to kiss the salt tears from her grimy, perfectly-oval, little face—to pour out the endearments that were choking me. I didn't. I just patted her clumsily, and made the stupid, clucking sounds an unaccustomed male makes to a distressed child.

It passed after a time, and she pulled away from me, and I had enough sense to leave her alone while she washed her face and bathed her eyes in the pond. She joined me by the rock then, and we sat and looked out over the plain.

I didn't attempt to talk. We sat on and on in silence, though after a time I put my arm round her and pulled her head on to my shoulder. She slept again for a little, and when she woke the short autumn dusk was gathering. She rose to her feet, smiling down on me as I struggled stiffly to mine.

She said, "Thank you, Peter." It was the first time she had used my Christian name. I didn't even know she knew me by anything else than the Stavro that Andreas used. I must have looked my surprise because she went on, "Seven students sitting on the terrace overlooking the harbour. Your names are written underneath. Your ears still stick out." I remembered the photo an itinerant photographer had taken that summer which now seemed a century ago. Ears or no ears, I was absurdly pleased.

I tried to take her hands again, but she slipped away and started to unpack the remains of the food from the bag.

Andreas woke then and, as we ate, Silene described the route we should take to the lighthouse . . .

The ease with which we got to the cove was almost an anticlimax. Silene tethered the mule in a vineyard some distance from the cliff top, and Andreas' feet stood the journey down surprisingly well. There was a bad moment when I scrabbled under the wrong rock and couldn't find the signalling torch, but I realised my mistake after a while and found it just where it should have been.

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I flashed the three shorts and a long out to sea, and then we crawled across the sand to the water's edge, and waited.

It seemed hours, although in actual fact it was but a short fifteen minutes before the rubber dinghy bumped softly down in the wavelets almost directly in front of us.

I gave the password to the lone A.B., and told him to take Silene first. Like a fool I said, " This lady," and the sailor jibbed. His orders were two gents, he told me.

Andreas said impatiently, " Oh, go on, for God's sake, and get permission from the skipper. We'll have the whole damned Waffen S.S. down on us if we argue here much longer."

Then I wanted him to go first. Those dinghies only take two. I thought he was going to hit me. He didn't, though—just ordered me into the dinghy with a touch of Guardee's rasp that paralysed me with stuttering rage, but which I obeyed.

The journey back on the end of the light cord was smooth and swift. I scrambled up the slippery plates and then climbed the conning-tower ladder under the levelled Stens of two muffled sailors. I knew the drill—we'd done it before. The navy are jealous of their bridges.

Having been frisked and passed by the Officer of the Watch, I said, " Another agent to come besides us—a woman," and got below out of the way.

The reaction was setting in now. The sheer relaxing of the tension left me weak and fluttery in the pit of the belly. White-sweatered sailors were watching dials and standing alertly to controls. Hove-to in shoaling water off a dark, hostile coast is a nervy business. I leaned against a folded cot and waited—waited an interminable age until movement above told me the dinghy had returned.

It was with a shock of absolute rage that I saw Andreas' swathed feet coming gingerly down the ladder. Surely the lout hadn't let her stay till last?

He joined me on the oily plates as the klaxon rang for diving stations, and the muffled hum of dynamos and engines stepped up their tempo.

" Silene? " I shouted. " Where the hell is she? "

" She's not coming," he told me quietly.

" I'm going back," I said, realising the futility of it as I said it . . . A red film dropped over my eyes. I swung straight at his chin —but, sick man though he was, Andreas beat me to the punch and I went backwards, my head crashing into the steel plates behind me. Curtains. Red-spangled, black velvet curtains, and nothing more.

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★ *The last part of The Achilles Affair, by Berkely Mather, appears in next month's Argosy on sale March 10*

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ARGOSY CROSS-WORD

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Solution on Page 94

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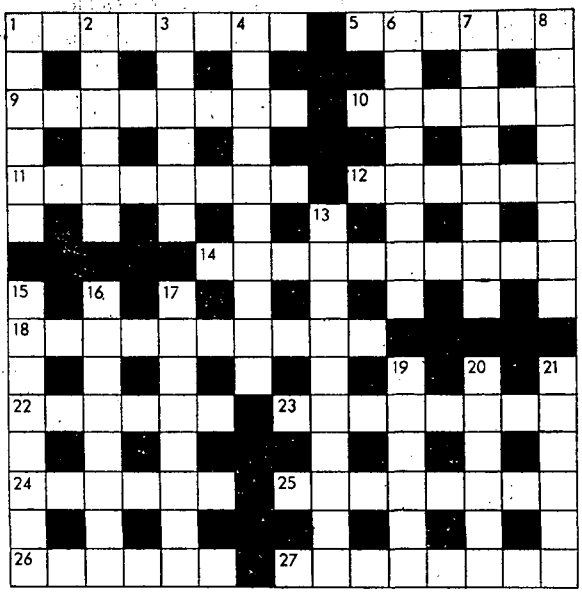

CLUES

Across

1 Chops off the head that bears the crown (8).

5 Homespun apple (6).

9 Gratuitous testament, maybe (4, 4).

10, 14 He admitted felling 13 (6, 10).

11 You pay these as a matter of courtesy (8).

12 Can denote the polish or the window (6).

18 In reverse tough as a sea bird (4, 6).

22 Glimpsed Inferno? (3-3).

23 Many diet for a blow-out (8).

24 Borderline? But these juveniles are not delinquents (6).

25 10, 14 was (8).

26 Swallow up a little New Guinea fuel (6).

27 Melt rage with wire (8).

Down

1 Improve the club? (6).

2 "Sweep on, you fat and —— citizens" (Shakespeare) (6).

3 But the poet is not pronouncedly bovine (6).

4 Talented it may be, but it's still amateur (10).

6 Keeping to the straight and narrow (8).

7 Galahad's was as that of ten (8).

8 Sounds like early golfing trouble (8).

13 See 10, 14 across (6-4).

15 Such able chap in Wilde play (8).

16 Poetic, or dramatic version? (8).

17 It's grand at Aintree (8).

19 Nice, new, and noisy (6).

20 In Cardiff eruption (6).

21 Ambled into uproar (6).

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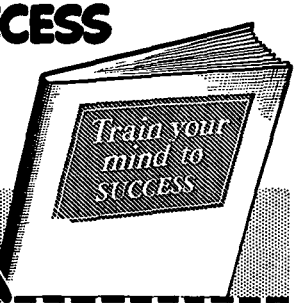

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